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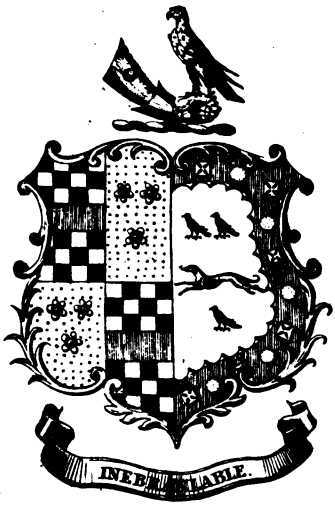

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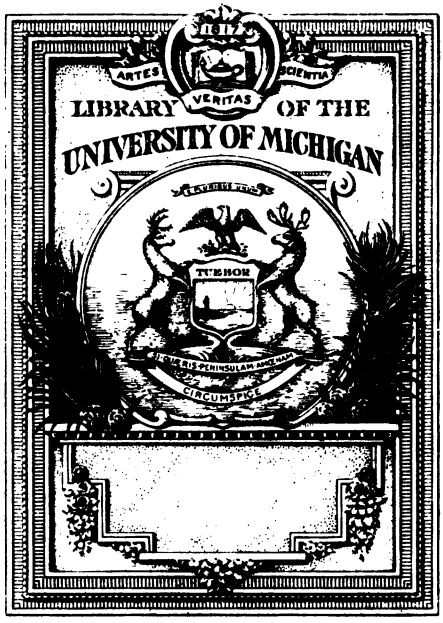
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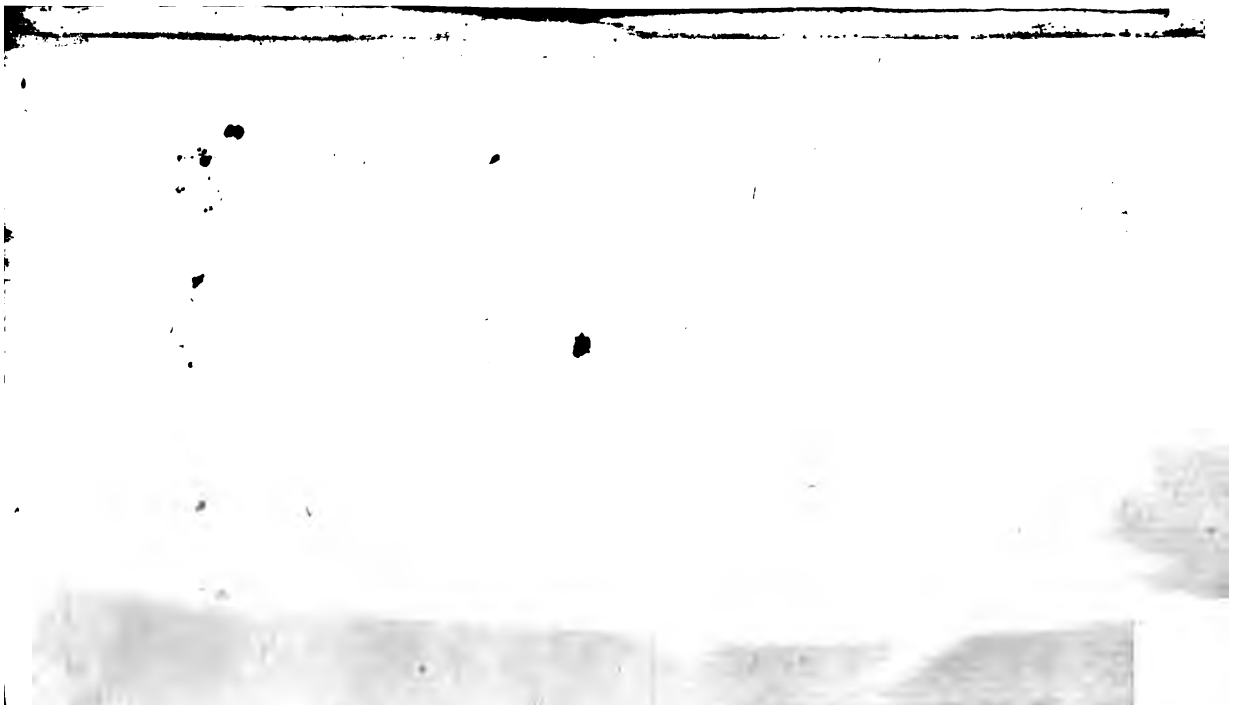

THE

WORKS

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Of the Most Reverend

Dr. JOHN TILLOTSON,

LATE

Lord Archbiſhop of CANTERBURY.

IN TEN VOLUMES.

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SER-

SERMON LXXXVI.

The ſin and danger of adding to the doctrine of the goſpel.

GALAT. i. 8, 9.

But though we, or an Angel from heaven, preach any other goſpel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accurſed. As we ſaid before, ſo ſay I now again, If any man preach any other goſpel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accurſed.

BEFORE I come to handle the words, for the better underſtanding of them, I ſhall give a brief account of the occaſion of them, which was this. Some falſe Apoſtles had made a great diſturbance in the churches planted by the Apoſtles of Chriſt, by teaching that it was neceſſary for Chriſtians, not only to embrace and entertain the doctrines and precepts of the Chriſtian religion, but likewiſe to be circumciſed, and keep the law of Moſes. Of this diſturbance which was raiſed in the Chriſtian church, you have the hiſtory at large, Acts xv. and as in ſeveral other churches, particularly in that of Galatia, theſe falſe Apoſtles and ſeducers had perverted many, as appears by this epiſtle; in the beginning whereof St. Paul complains, that thoſe who were ſo ſeduced into this error of the neceſſity of circumciſion, and keeping the law of Moſes, had, by this new article of faith, which they had added to the Chriſtian religion, quite altered the frame of it, and made the goſpel another thing from that which our Saviour delivered, and commanded his Apoſtles to teach all nations.

For he tells us, ver. 6. of this chapter, that *he marvelled, that they were ſo ſoon removed from him that called them by (or through) the grace of Chriſt, unto another goſpel*, that is ſo different from that which

they had been inſtructed in by thoſe who firſt preached the goſpel unto them; for the making of any thing neceſſary to ſalvation, which our Saviour in his goſpel had not made ſo, he calls *another goſpel. I marvel, that ye are ſo ſoon removed from him that called you by the grace of Chriſt, unto another goſpel, which is not another,* ὃ οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλο, *which is no other thing,* or *by which I mean nothing elſe, but that there are ſome that trouble you, and would pervert the goſpel of Chriſt*; as if he had ſaid, when I ſay that *ye are removed to another goſpel*, I do not mean that ye have renounced Chriſtianity, and are gone over to another religion, but that ye are ſeduced by thoſe who have a mind to pervert the goſpel of Chriſt, by adding ſomething to it, as a neceſſary and eſſential part of it, which Chriſt hath not made ſo: This the Apoſtle calls a perverting or overthrowing of the goſpel; becauſe, by thus altering the terms and conditions of it, they made it quite another thing from what our Saviour delivered it.

And then at the 8th and 9th verſes he denounceth a terrible anathema againſt thoſe, whoever they ſhall be, yea, though it were an Apoſtle, or an Angel from heaven, who by thus *perverting the goſpel of Chriſt* (that is, by making any thing neceſſary to be believed or practiſed, which our Saviour in his goſpel hath not made ſo) ſhould in effect *preach another goſpel; but though we, or an Angel from heaven, preach any other goſpel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be anathema, an accurſed thing*, and then to expreſs his confidence and vehemency in this matter, and to ſhew that he did not ſpeak this raſhly, and in a heat, but upon due conſideration, he repeats it again in the next verſe, *As we ſaid before, ſo ſay I now again, if any man preach any other goſpel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accurſed.*

From the words thus explained by the conſideration of the context, and of the main ſcope and deſign of this epiſtle, theſe following *obſervations* do naturally ariſe.

Firſt, That the addition of any thing to the Chriſtian

an religion, as neceſſary to be believed and practiſed in order to ſalvation, is *a perverting of the goſpel of Chriſt, and preaching another goſpel.*

Secondly, That no pretence of infallibility is ſufficient to authoriſe and warrant the addition of any thing to the Chriſtian doctrine, as neceſſary to be believed and practiſed in order to ſalvation.

Thirdly, That Chriſtians may judge and diſcern when ſuch additions are made.

Fourthly, And conſequently, that ſince the declaration of the goſpel, and the confirmation of it, there is no authority in the Chriſtian church to impoſe upon Chriſtians any thing as of neceſſity to ſalvation, which the goſpel hath not made ſo.

Fifthly, That there is no viſible judge (how infallible ſoever he may pretend to be) to whoſe definitions and declarations in matters of faith and practice neceſſary to ſalvation, we are bound to ſubmit, without examination whether theſe things be agreeable to the goſpel of Chriſt, or not.

Sixthly, and *laſtly*, Whoſoever teacheth any thing as of neceſſity to ſalvation, to be believed or practiſed, beſides what the goſpel of Chriſt hath made neceſſary, doth fall under the anathema here in the text, becauſe in ſo doing, *he perverteth the goſpel of Chriſt, and preacheth another goſpel.* Now the Apoſtle expreſly declares, *that though we* (that is, he himſelf, or any of the Apoſtles) *or an Angel from heaven, preach any other goſpel unto you, than what we have preached unto you, let him be accurſed: As we ſaid before, ſo ſay I now again, if any man preach any other goſpel unto you, than that you have received, let him be accurſed.*

I. That the addition of any thing to the Chriſtian religion as neceſſary to be believed or practiſed, in order to ſalvation, is *a perverting of the goſpel of Chriſt, and preaching another goſpel.*

This is evident from the inſtances here given in this epiſtle; for the Apoſtle chargeth the falſe Apoſtles with *perverting the goſpel of Chriſt, and preaching another goſpel*, upon no other account, but becauſe they added to the Chriſtian religion, and made cir-

cumciſion, and the keeping of the law of Moſes, an eſſential part of the Chriſtian religion, and impoſed upon Chriſtians the practice of theſe things, and the belief of the neceſſity of them, as a condition of eternal ſalvation.

That this was the doctrine of thoſe falſe teachers, we find expreſly, Acts xv. 1. *And certain men which came down from Judea, taught the brethren, and ſaid, Except ye be circumciſed after the manner of Moſes, ye cannot be ſaved*; and ver. 24. in the letter written by the Apoſtles and Elders at Jeruſalem, to the churches abroad, there is this account given of it; *foraſmuch as we have heard that certain which went out from us, have troubled you with words, ſubverting your ſouls, ſaying, ye muſt be circumciſed, and keep the law, to whom we gave no ſuch commandment.* Where you ſee that this doctrine is declared to be of pernicious conſequence, tending *to ſubvert the ſouls of men*, and likewiſe to be an addition to the doctrine of the goſpel which was delivered by the Apoſtles, who here with one conſent declare, that *they had given no ſuch commandment*; that is, had delivered no ſuch doctrine as this, nor put any ſuch yoke upon the necks of Chriſtians; but on the contrary had declared, that the death of Chriſt having put an end to the Jewiſh diſpenſation, there was now no obligation upon Chriſtians to obſerve the law of Moſes.

And from the reaſon of the thing it is very plain, that the addition of any thing to the Chriſtian religion, as neceſſary to be believed or practiſed in order to ſalvation, which the goſpel hath not made ſo, is *preaching another goſpel*; becauſe it makes an eſſential change in the terms and conditions of the goſpel-covenant, which declares ſalvation unto men upon ſuch and ſuch terms, and no other. Now to add any other terms to theſe, as of equal neceſſity with them, is to alter the condition of the covenant of the goſpel, and the terms of the Chriſtian religion, and conſequently *to preach another goſpel*, by declaring other terms of ſalvation, than Chriſt in his goſpel hath declared, which is to *pervert the goſpel of Chriſt*.

II. No

II. No pretence of infallibility is sufficient to authorize and warrant the addition of any thing to the Christian doctrine, as necessary to be believed or practised, in order to salvation. After the delivery of the gospel by the Son of God, and the publication of it to the world by his Apostles, who were commissioned and inspired by him to that purpose, and the confirmation of all, by the greatest and most unquestionable miracles that ever were, no person whatever that brought any other doctrine, and declared salvation to men on any other terms than those which are declared in the gospel, was to be credited, what pretence soever he should make to a divine commission or an infallible assistance. The Apostle makes a supposition as high as can be, *though we* (says he) *or an Angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be an anathema.* If the Apostles themselves, who were divinely commissioned, and infallibly assisted in the preaching of the gospel, should afterwards make any addition to it, or declare any other terms of salvation, than those which are declared in the gospel which they had already published to the world, they ought not to be regarded.

And the reason is plain; because what claim soever any person may make to infallibility, and what demonstration soever he may give of it, we cannot possibly believe him, if he contradict himself, and deliver doctrines which do plainly clash with one another: For if he spake true at first, I cannot believe him declaring the contrary afterwards: And if he did not speak true at first, I cannot believe him at all; because he can give no greater proof of his divine commission, and infallible assistance and inspiration, than he did at first.

And the reason is the same, if *an Angel from heaven* should come and preach a contrary doctrine to that of the gospel, he were not to be believed neither; because he could bring no better credentials of his divine commission and authority than those had who published the gospel, and, consequently, he ought not to be credited in any thing contrary to what they

had publiſhed before. For though a man were never ſo much diſpoſed to receive a revelation from God, and to ſubmit his faith to it; yet it is not poſſible for any man to believe God againſt God himſelf; that is, to believe two revelations, plainly contradictory to one another, to be from God; and the reaſon of this is very obvious, becauſe every man doth firſt, and more firmly, believe this propoſition or principle, *That contradictions cannot be true*, than any revelation whatſoever; for if contradictions may be true, then no revelation from God can ſignify any thing, becauſe the contrary may be equally true, and ſo truth and falſhood be all one.

The Apoſtle indeed only makes a *ſuppoſition*, when he ſays, *though we or an Angel from heaven preach any other doctrine unto you*; but by this *ſuppoſition* he plainly bars any man or company of men, from adding to the Chriſtian religion any article of faith, or point of practice, as of neceſſity to ſalvation, which the goſpel hath not made ſo; I ſay, any man, or company of men, whatever authority or infallibility they may lay claim to, becauſe they cannot pretend to a clearer commiſſion and greater evidence of infallible aſſiſtance, than *an Apoſtle* or *an Angel from heaven*, and yet the text tells us, that would not be a ſufficient warrant to preach another goſpel. It might indeed bring in queſtion that which they had preached before, but could not give credit and authority to any thing plainly contrary to it, and inconſiſtent with it.

III. Chriſtians may judge and diſcern when *another goſpel is preached*, when new articles of faith, or points of practice, not enjoined in the goſpel, are impoſed upon Chriſtians. This the Apoſtle ſuppoſeth every particular church, and for ought I know, every particular Chriſtian, that is duly inſtructed in the Chriſtian religion, to be a competent judge of, and to be ſufficiently able to diſcern *when another goſpel is preached*, and new terms and conditions, not declared in the goſpel, are added to the Chriſtian religion; for if they be not able to judge of this, the Apoſtle does in vain caution them againſt the ſe-

duction

duction of thoſe *who perverted the doctrine of Chriſt, and endeavoured to remove them from him, that had called them by the grace of Chriſt, unto another goſpel.*

It may perhaps be ſaid, that there was no need that they ſhould be able to diſcern and judge of the doctrines of thoſe falſe teachers; it was ſufficient for them to believe the Apoſtle concerning the doctrines of thoſe ſeducers, when he declared to them the falſhood and pernicious conſequence of them. But the Apoſtle ſpeaks to them upon another ſuppoſition, which does neceſſarily imply, tha: they were able to diſcern and judge what doctrines were agreeable to the goſpel, and what not; for he puts the caſe, that if he himſelf, or any of the Apoſtles, or an Angel from heaven, ſhould preach to them another doctrine, contrary to that of the goſpel, they ought to reject it with deteſtation. But this doth neceſſarily ſuppoſe them able to judge, when ſuch doctrines were preached, and conſequently that all things neceſſary to be believed and practiſed by all Chriſtians, are clearly and plainly declared in the goſpel; all the doctrines whereof are now contained in the holy ſcriptures, in which all things neceſſary to faith, and a good life, are ſo plainly delivered, that any ſober and inquiſitive perſon may learn them from thence; and the meaneſt capacity, by the help and direction of their guides and teachers, may be inſtructed in them.

And this is not only the principle of Proteſtants, but the expreſs and conſtant doctrine of the ancient fathers of the church, whatever the church of Rome, for the maintaining of her uſurped authority over the conſciences of men, pretends to the contrary. And if this were not ſo, that men are able to diſcern and judge, which are the doctrines of the goſpel, and what is contrary to them; the doctrine of the goſpel was in vain preached, and the holy ſcriptures containing that doctrine were written to no purpoſe.

Some things in ſcripture are granted to be obſcure and difficult, on purpoſe to exerciſe the ſtudy and enquiries of thoſe who have leiſure and capacity for it: But all things neceſſary are ſufficiently plain; o-

therwiſe

therwiſe it would be impoſſible to judge when *another goſpel is preached*, which the Apoſtle here ſuppoſeth the Galatians capable of doing. For if the revelation of the goſpel be not ſufficiently plain in all things neceſſary to be believed and practiſed, then Chriſtians have no rule whereby to judge what doctrines are agreeable to the goſpel, and what not; for an obſcure rule is of no uſe, that is, in truth, is no rule to thoſe to whom it is obſcure.

I proceed to the IVth *obſervation*, which is plainly conſequent from thoſe laid down before; namely, that ſince the declaration of the goſpel, and the confirmation given to it, there is no authority in the Chriſtian church to impoſe upon Chriſtians any thing, as of neceſſity to ſalvation, which the goſpel hath not made ſo.

The commiſſion given by our Lord and Saviour to his Apoſtles, was *to preach the goſpel to all nations* (or, as St. Matthew expreſſes it) *to go and teach all nations, to obſerve all things whatſoever he had commanded them*. And this is that which we call the *Goſpel*, viz. that doctrine which Chriſt commanded his Apoſtles to preach and publiſh to the world; and if the Apoſtles themſelves had exceeded their commiſſion, and added any other points of faith or practice to thoſe which our Saviour gave them in charge to teach and publiſh to the world, they had, in ſo doing, been guilty of that which St. Paul here in the text chargeth the falſe Apoſtles with, viz. of *preaching another goſpel*. And if the Apoſtles had no authority to add any thing to the goſpel, much leſs can any others pretend to it, ſince they have neither ſo immediate a commiſſion, nor ſuch a miraculous power to give teſtimony to them, that *they are teachers come from God*.

Now this doctrine of the goſpel, which the Apoſtles preached to the world, is that which Chriſtians are ſo often, and ſo earneſtly by the Apoſtles in all their epiſtles *exhorted to continue in, and not to ſuffer themſelves to be ſhaken in mind, by every wind of new doctrine*; becauſe that which the Apoſtles had delivered to them, was the entire doctrine of the goſpel,

spel, which was never to receive any addition or alteration. This is that which St. Peter calls, *the holy commandment which was delivered unto them,* 2 Pet. ii. 21. *It had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them,* speaking in all probability of those who were seduced by the errors of the Gnosticks, from the purity of the Christian doctrine delivered to them by the Apostles. This likewise St. Paul calls *the common faith,* Titus i. 4. and St. Jude, ver. 3. *the common salvation*; that is, the doctrine which contains the common terms of salvation, and *the faith which was once delivered to the saints,* that is, by the Apostles of our Lord, who published the gospel; *once delivered,* that is once for all, so as never afterwards to admit of any change or alteration. This faith he *exhorts* Christians *earnestly to contend for,* against those several sects of seducers, which were crept into the Christian church, and did endeavour by several arts *to pervert the gospel of Christ,* and to deprave *the faith delivered* by the Apostles.

So that the doctrine of the gospel published by the Apostles, is fixed and unalterable, and there can be no authority in the church to make any change in it, either by taking from it, or adding any thing to it, as necessary to be believed or practised in order to salvation.

V. It follows likewise from the foregoing observations, that there is no *visible judge* (how much soever he may pretend to *infallibility*) to whose determination and decision in matters of faith and practice necessary to salvation, Christians are bound to submit, without examination whether those things be agreeable to the doctrine of the gospel, or not.

When our Saviour appeared in the world, though he had authority enough to exact belief from men, yet because there was a standing revelation of God made to the Jews, he appeals to that revelation, as well as to his own miracles, for the truth of what he said, and offered himself, and his doctrine to be tried by the agreeableness of it to the scriptures of the

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Old Teſtament, and the predictions therein concerning him. And this was but reaſonable, it being impoſſible for any man to receive two revelations, as from God, without liberty to examine whether they be agreeable to, and conſiſtent with one another. In like manner the Apoſtles of our Lord and Saviour, though they were guided and aſſiſted by an infallible ſpirit, and had an immediate commiſſion from Chriſt to preach the doctrine of the goſpel, did not require from men abſolute ſubmiſſion to their doctrines and dictates, without examination of what they delivered, whether it were agreeable to the divine revelation which was contained in the ancient ſcriptures.

This was St. Paul's conſtant cuſtom and way of teaching among the Jews, who had received the revelation of the Old Teſtament; he did not dictate to them by virtue of his infallibility, but *reaſoned with them out of the ſcriptures*, and required their belief no farther than what he ſaid ſhould, upon examination, appear agreeable to the ſcriptures. So we find, Acts xvii. 2, 3. *And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them* (ſpeaking of the Jews) *and three ſabbath days reaſoned with them out of the ſcriptures, opening and alledging, that Chriſt muſt needs have ſuffered, and riſen again from the dead, and that this Jeſus whom I preach unto you is the Chriſt.* And chap. xviii. 28. *he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publickly, ſhewing by the ſcriptures that Jeſus was the Chriſt.* And St. Paul was ſo far from reproving them for examining his doctrine by the ſcriptures, that he commended it, as an argument of a noble and generous mind in the Bereans, that they did not give full aſſent to his doctrine, till upon due ſearch and examination they were ſatisfied that what he had ſaid was agreeable to the ſcriptures, chap. xvii. 11, 12. where ſpeaking of the Bereans, it is ſaid, *That theſe were more noble than thoſe in Theſſalonica, in that they received the word, with all readineſs of mind, and ſearched the ſcriptures daily, whether thoſe things were ſo; therefore many of them believed*; that is, becauſe upon ſearch they

they found what he delivered to be agreeable to the ſcriptures; and it was not a ſlight, but diligent and deliberate ſearch, they took time to examine things thoroughly; for it is ſaid *they ſearched the ſcriptures daily*. And here in the text St. Paul puts the caſe, that if he, or any other of the Apoſtles, concerning whoſe divine commiſſion and aſſiſtance they were ſo fully ſatisfied ſhould deliver any thing to them contrary to the goſpel which they had formerly preached, they were to reject it with the greateſt abhorrence and deteſtation; and this neceſſarily ſuppoſeth a liberty to examine what was delivered, even by thoſe whom they believed to be infallibly aſſiſted, and a capacity to diſcern and judge whether what they ſaid was agreeable to the goſpel at firſt delivered to them, or not.

And after this, ſhall any perſon or church (what claim ſoever they may make to infallibility) aſſume to themſelves an authority to dictate in matters of faith, and that their dictates ought to be received with an abſolute ſubmiſſion, and without liberty to examine whether they be agreeable to *the faith once delivered to the ſaints*; and though they add new articles to the Chriſtian faith, and of which there is not the leaſt footſtep or intimation in any of the ancient creeds of the Chriſtian church, and do plainly impoſe upon Chriſtians the practice and belief of ſeveral things as neceſſary to ſalvation, which the goſpel never declared to be ſo, yet no body ſhall judge of this, but every man ought without more ado, to believe blindfold, and to reſign up his underſtanding and judgment to the directions of this *viſible infallible judge?*

But ſurely this is not the reaſonable *obedience of faith*, but the forced ſubmiſſion of ſlaves to the tyranny of their maſters. Chriſtians are expreſly forbid *to call any man father or maſter upon earth*, becauſe *we have one father and maſter in heaven*. Now to make an abſolute ſubmiſſion of our underſtandings to any upon earth, ſo as, without examination, to receive their dictates in matters of faith, is ſurely, if any thing can be ſo, *to call ſuch a perſon father*

or maſter; becauſe a greater ſubmiſſion than this we cannot pay to *our father who is in heaven*, even to God himſelf. I come now to the

VI. and laſt *obſervation* from the text, that whoſoever teacheth any thing as of neceſſity to ſalvation, to be believed or practiſed, beſides what the goſpel of Chriſt hath made neceſſary, does fall under the anathema here in the text; becauſe they that do ſo, do, according to the mind of St. Paul, *pervert the goſpel of Chriſt, and preach another goſpel.* For the reaſon why he chargeth the falſe Apoſtles with *preaching another goſpel*, and thoſe that were ſeduced by them, as *being removed from him that called them into the grace of Chriſt, unto another goſpel*, is plainly this, that they had changed the terms of the Chriſtian religion, by adding new articles to it, which were not contained in the goſpel; that is, by making it neceſſary to believe it to be ſo, becauſe they taught ſo. Now St. Paul expreſly declares this to be *preaching another goſpel*, becauſe they plainly altered the terms of ſalvation declared in the goſpel, and made that to be neceſſary to the ſalvation of men, which the goſpel had not made ſo.

And whatever perſon or church does the ſame, does incur the ſame guilt, and falls under the anathema and cenſure here in the text; yea, *though he were an Apoſtle or an Angel:* And I am ſure no Biſhop or church in the world can pretend either to an equal authority or infallibility with an *Apoſtle, or an Angel from heaven.*

Let us then hear what St. Paul declares in this caſe, and conſider ſeriouſly, with what earneſtneſs and vehemency he declares it; *Though we* (ſays he) *or an Angel from heaven preach any other goſpel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accurſed. As we ſaid before, ſo ſay I now again, if any man preach any other goſpel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accurſed.* St. Paul, you ſee, is very earneſt in this matter, and very peremptory, and therefore I cannot but think this declaration of his to be more conſiderable, and every way more worthy of our regard and dread, than all the

the anathemas of the *council of Trent*, which, in direct affront and contempt of this anathema of St. Paul, hath presumed to add so many articles to the Christian religion, upon the counterfeit warrant of tradition, for which there is no ground or warrant from the scripture, or from any ancient creed of the Christian church.

And for the truth of this, I appeal to the creed of Pope *Pius* IV. compiled out of the definitions of *the council of Trent*; by which *council* the *Pope* only is authorised to interprete the true sense and meaning of the canons and decrees of that *council*; and consequently his interpretations must be of equal force and authority with that of the *council* itself. So that whatsoever he hath put into his new creed for an article of faith, ought to be received with the same pious affection and veneration, as if the creed had been compiled by the *council* itself; because the *Pope*, it seems, and no body else, understands the true meaning of that *council*, at least is thought fit to declare it. And therefore one may justly wonder at the presumption of those, who after this declaration of the council, have taken upon them to *expound the catholick faith*, and to *represent* that religion to us, as it is defined in that *council*; because if there be any controversy about the meaning of its definitions (as there have been a great many even betwixt those who were present at the council when those definitions were made) none but the *Pope* himself can certainly tell the meaning of them.

Now in this creed of Pope *Pius*, there are added to the ancient creed of the Christian church, twelve or thirteen new articles, as concerning *purgatory, transubstantiation, the worship of images, the invocation of saints, the communion in one kind*, and that *the church of* Rome *is the mother and mistress of all churches*, and *that there is no salvation to be had out of it*; and several other points, all which have either no foundation in scripture, or are plainly contrary to it, and none of them ever esteemed as *articles of faith* in the ancient Christian church for the first five hundred years; and yet they are now obtruded upon

Christians as of equal necessity to salvation, with the *twelve articles of the Apostles creed*, and this under a pretence of infallibility, which St. Paul tells us would not have justified *an Apostle* or *an Angel from heaven*, in making such additions to the Christian religion, and the imposing any thing as necessary to salvation, which is not so declared by the gospel of Christ.

And all that they have to say for this is, that we do not pretend to be infallible; but there is a necessity of an infallible judge to decide these controversies, and to him they are to be referred. Which is just as if in a plain matter of right, a contentious and confident man should desire a reference, and contrive the matter so as to have it referred to himself, upon a sleeveless pretence, without any proof or evidence, that he is the only person in the world that hath authority and infallible skill to decide all such differences. Thus the *church of Rome* would deal with us in things which are as plain as the noon-day; as whether God hath forbidden the worship of images in the second commandment? whether our Saviour did institute the sacrament in both kinds? whether the people ought not to read the scriptures, and to have the publick service of God in a known tongue? these, and the like, they would have us refer to an infallible judge, and when we ask who he is, they tell us that their church, which hath imposed these things upon Christians, and made these additions to the gospel of Christ, is that infallible judge. But if she were as infallible as she pretends to be, even as *an Apostle, or an Angel from heaven*, St. Paul hath denounced an anathema against her, for *preaching another gospel*, and making those things necessary to the salvation of men, which are not contained in the *gospel of Christ*.

The *inference* from all this discourse in short is this, that *we should contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints*, and not suffer ourselves, by the confident pretences of seducers, *to be removed from him that hath called us through the grace of Christ, unto another gospel*. The necessary doctrines

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of the Chriſtian religion, and the common terms of ſalvation are ſo plain, that if any man be ignorant of them, it is his own fault; and if any go about to impoſe upon us any thing as of neceſſity to be believed and practiſed in order to ſalvation, which is not declared to be ſo in the holy ſcriptures, which contain the true doctrine of the goſpel, what authority ſoever they pretend for it, yea, though they aſſume to themſelves to be infallible, the Apoſtle hath plainly told us what we are to think of them; for he hath put the caſe as high as poſſible here in the text, when he ſays, *Though we, or an Angel from heaven preach any other goſpel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accurſed.*

I will conclude all with that counſel which the ſpirit of God gives to the churches of Aſia, Rev. iii. 3. *Remember therefore how thou haſt received and heard, and hold faſt*; and chap. ii. 10. *Fear none of thoſe things which thou ſhalt ſuffer, be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*

SERMON LXXXVII.

Honeſty the beſt preſervative againſt dangerous miſtakes in religion.

JOHN vii. 17.

If any man will do his will, he ſhall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I ſpeak of myſelf.

SINCE there are ſo many different opinions and apprehenſions in the world about matters of religion, and every ſect and party does with ſo much confidence pretend that they and they only, are in the truth; the great difficulty and queſtion is, by what means men may be ſecured from dangerous errors and miſtakes in religion. For this end ſome have thought

it necessary, that there should be *an infallible church*, in the communion whereof every man may be secured from the dangers of a wrong belief. But it seems God hath not thought this necessary: If he had, he would have revealed this very thing more plainly than any particular point of faith whatsoever. He would have told us expressly, and in the plainest terms, that he had appointed *an infallible guide and judge in matters of faith*, and would likewise have told us as plainly who he was, and where we might find him, and have recourse to him upon all occasions: because the sincerity of our faith depending upon him, we could not be safe from mistake in particular points, without so plain and clear a revelation of this *infallible judge*, that there could be no mistake about him; nor could there be an end of any other controversies in religion, unless this *infallible judge* (both that there is one, and who he is) were out of controversy. But neither of these are so: It is not plain from scripture, that there is *an infallible guide and judge in matters of faith*; much less is it plain who he is; and therefore we may certainly conclude, that God hath not thought it necessary that there should be *an infallible guide and judge in matters of faith*, because he hath revealed no such thing to us, and that Bishop, and that church who only have arrogated infallibility to themselves, have given the greatest evidence in the world to the contrary; and have been detected and stand convinced of the greatest errors: and it is in vain for any man, or company of men, to pretend to infallibility, so long as the evidence that they are deceived is much greater and clearer than any proof they can produce for their infallibility.

If then God hath not provided *an infallible guide and judge in matters of faith*; there is some other way whereby men may be secured against dangerous and damnable errors in religion, and whereby they may discern truth from imposture, and what doctrines are from God, and what not; and this our Saviour declares to us here in the text, namely, that an honest and sincere mind, and a hearty desire to

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do the will of God, is the best preservative against fatal errors and mistakes in matters of religion; ἐάν τις θέλῃ ποιεῖν· *If any man desire to do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.*

There are two dangerous mistakes in religion: To reject any thing which really comes from God; and to receive and entertain any thing as from God, which doth not really come from him.

First, To reject any thing which really comes from God. This mistake the Jews frequently fell into, when they rejected the true Prophets which God from time to time sent to them, slighting their message, and persecuting their persons: but they miscarried most fatally and remarkably in their contempt of the true Messias, that great Prophet whom they had so long expected, and whom God sent at last, to bring salvation to them; but when he came, they knew him not, nor would receive him, but used him with all the despight and contempt imaginable, not as *a teacher come from God*, but as a deceiver and impostor.

Now the danger of rejecting any thing that comes from God, consists in this, that it cannot be done, without the highest affront to the divine majesty. To reject a divine message or revelation, is to oppose God, and *fight against him.* So our Saviour tells the Jews, that *in despising him, they despised him that sent him.*

Secondly, There is also another dangerous mistake on the other hand, in entertaining any thing as a revelation from God, which is not really from him. And this likewise the Jews were frequently guilty of, in receiving the false Prophets which spake in the name of the Lord, when he had not sent them. And this is commonly the temper of those who reject the truth, greedily to swallow error and delusion. So our Saviour tells us of the Jews, John v. 43. *I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not; if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive.* This prediction of our Saviour's concerning the Jews was fully accomplished; for after they had rejected him, who gave such abundant evidence

that he was the true Messias, and *a teacher sent from God*, they received others, who really came in their own names, and ran after those who pretended to be the Messias, and were in great numbers destroyed with them. And this is very just with God, that *those who receive not the truth in the love of it, should be given up to strong delusions, to believe lies.*

Now these being the two great dangerous mistakes in religion which men are liable to, my work at this time shall be to shew, how a sincere desire and endeavour *to do the will of God*, is a security to men against both these dangers; and it will appear to be so, upon these two accounts:

I. Because he who sincerely desires and endeavours to do the will of God, is hereby better qualified and disposed to make a right judgment of spiritual and divine things.

II. Because God's providence is more especially concerned to secure such persons from dangerous errors and mistakes in things which concern their eternal salvation. These shall be the two heads of my following discourse.

I. Because he who sincerely desires and endeavours to do the will of God, is hereby better qualified and disposed to make a right judgment of spiritual and divine things, and that for these two reasons:

1. Because such a person hath a truer notion of God, and divine things.

2. Because he is more impartial in his search and enquiry after truth.

1. Because such a person hath a truer notion of God and divine things. No man is so likely to have clear and true apprehensions of God, as a good man; because he hath transcribed the divine perfections in his own mind, and is himself in some measure and degree what God is. And for this reason it is, that the scripture so often lays the foundation of all divine knowledge in the practice of religion, Job xxviii. 28. *The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil, is understanding*; and Psal. cxi. 10. *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*, that is, the

the principle and foundation of it; *a good underſtanding have all they that do his commandments:* whereas the vices and luſts of men darken their reaſon and diſtort their underſtandings, and fill the mind with groſs and ſenſual apprehenſions of things, and thereby render men unfit to diſcern thoſe truths which are of a ſpiritual nature and tendency, and altogether indiſpoſed to receive them. For though the vices of men be properly ſeated in their wills, and do not poſſeſs their underſtandings; yet they have a bad influence upon them, as fumes and vapours from the ſtomach are wont to affect the head.

Nothing indeed is more natural to the mind and underſtanding of men, than the knowledge of God; but we may abuſe our faculties, and render them unfit for the diſcerning even of their proper objects.

When men, by wicked practices, have rendered themſelves unlike to God, they will not love to *retain the knowledge of him* in their minds, but will *become vain in their imaginations* concerning him. What clouds and miſts are to the bodily eye, that the luſts and corruptions of men are to the underſtanding; they hinder it from a clear perception of heavenly things; *the pure in heart,* they are beſt qualified for *the ſight of God.*

Now according as a man's notions of God are, ſuch will be his apprehenſions of religion. All religion is either *natural* or *revealed. Natural religion* conſiſts in the belief of a God, and in right conceptions and apprehenſions concerning him, and in a due reverence and obſervance of him, and in a ready and chearful obedience to thoſe laws which he hath imprinted upon our nature; and the ſum of our obedience conſiſts in our conformity to God, and an endeavour to be like him. For ſuppoſing God to have made no external revelation of his mind to us, we have no other way to know his will, but by conſidering his nature, and our own; and if ſo, then he that reſembles God moſt, is like to underſtand him beſt, becauſe he finds thoſe perfections in ſome meaſure in himſelf, which he contemplates in the divine nature; and nothing gives a man ſo ſure a notion

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of things, as practice and experience. Every good man is in some degree *partaker of a divine nature*, and feels that in himself which he conceives to be in God: So that this man does experience what others do but talk of; he sees the image of God in himself, and is able to discourse of him from an inward sense and feeling of his excellency and perfections.

And as for *revealed religion*, the only design of that is, to revive and improve the natural notions which we have of God, and all our reasonings about divine revelation are necessarily gathered by our natural notions of religion: And therefore he that sincerely endeavours *to do the will of God*, is not apt to be imposed upon by the vain and confident pretences of divine revelation; but if any doctrine be proposed to him, which pretends to come from God, he measures it by those steady and sure notions which he hath of the divine nature and perfections, and by those he will easily discern whether it be worthy of God, or not, and likely to proceed from him: He will consider the nature and tendency of it, and whether it be (as the Apostle expresses it) *a doctrine according to godliness*, such as is agreeable to the divine nature and perfections, and tends to make us like to God: If it be not, though *an Angel from heaven* should bring it, he will not receive it: If it be, he will not reject it upon every idle pretence, and frivolous exception that prejudiced and ill-minded men may make against it; but after he is satisfied of the reasonableness and purity of the doctrine, he will accept of such evidence and confirmation of it, as is fit for God to give to his own revelations; and if the person that brings it, hath an attestation of miracles (which is necessary in case it be a new doctrine) and if he carry on no earthly interest and design by it, but does by his life and actions make it evident that he aims at the glory of God, and the good of men; in this case a good man, whose mind is free from passion and prejudice, will easily assent, that this man's *doctrine is of God, and that he does not speak of himself*. This was the

the evidence which our Saviour offered to the Jews in vindication of himſelf and his doctrine, John vii. 18. *He that ſpeaketh of himſelf, ſeeketh his own glory: but he that ſeeketh his glory that ſent him, the ſame is true, and no unrighteouſneſs is in him*; as if he had ſaid, Hereby you may diſtinguiſh one that really comes from God, from an impoſtor: if any man ſeek his own glory, you may conclude that God hath not ſent him, but, whatever he pretends, that he ſpeaks of himſelf; but he who by his life, and the courſe of his actions demonſtrates that he ſeeks the honour of God, and not any intereſt and advantage of his own, *the ſame is true, and there is no unrighteouſneſs in him*; that is, no falſhood or deſign to deceive (for ſo the word ἀδικία does ſometimes ſignify;) you may conclude ſuch an one to be no deceiver, or impoſtor. And if any man ſincerely deſires and endeavours to do the will of God, he may by ſuch marks and characters as theſe, judge of any doctrine that pretends to be from God, whether it be ſo or not. This is the firſt reaſon; becauſe he that ſincerely deſires and endeavours to do the will of God, hath the trueſt notion of God, and of divine things.

2. Such a perſon is more impartial in his ſearch and enquiry after truth, and therefore more likely to find it, and to diſcern it from error. He that hath an honeſt mind, and ſincerely endeavours to do the will of God, is not apt to be ſwayed and biaſſed by any intereſt or luſt: For his greateſt intereſt is to pleaſe God, and he makes all his other intereſts and concernments to ſtoop and yield to that. But if a man be governed by any earthly intereſt or deſign, he will meaſure all things by that, and is not at liberty to entertain any thing that croſſes it, and to judge equally of any doctrine that is oppoſite to his intereſt. This our Saviour gives for a reaſon, why the great Rabbies and Teachers among the Jews did not believe and embrace his doctrine, John v. 44. *How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another?* If men have any other deſign in religion than to pleaſe God, and to advance his honour and glory in the world,

world, no wonder, if they be apt to reject the moſt divine truths, becauſe theſe are calculated, not to approve us to men, but to God.

And as vain-glory, and deſire of the applauſe of men; ſo likewiſe doth every other luſt make a man partial in his judgment of things, and clap a falſe bias upon his underſtanding, which carries it off from truth, and makes it to lean towards that ſide of the queſtion which is moſt favourable to the intereſt of his luſts. A vicious man is not willing to entertain thoſe truths which would croſs and check him in his courſe: he hath made the truth his enemy; and therefore he thinks himſelf concerned to oppoſe it, and riſe up againſt it: the light of it offends him, and therefore he ſhuts his eyes that he may not ſee it. Thoſe holy and pure doctrines, which are from God, reprove the luſts of men, and diſcover the deformity of them; and therefore no wonder, if bad men be ſo hard to be reconciled to them. This account our Saviour likewiſe gives of the fierce enmity of the Jews to him, and his doctrine, John iii. 19, 20. *Light is come into the world, and men loved darkneſs rather than light, becauſe their deeds were evil; for every one that hath done evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, leſt his deeds ſhould be reproved.*

The vicious inclinations of men are a dead weight upon their underſtandings, and able to draw down the ſcales againſt the cleareſt truths: For though it be abſolutely in no man's power to believe, or to disbelieve what he will; yet mens lives have many times a great influence upon their underſtandings, to make aſſent eaſy or difficult; and as we are forward to believe what we have a mind to, ſo are we very backward and ſlow in yielding our aſſent to any thing that croſſeth our inclinations. Men that allow themſelves in ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, will not eaſily believe thoſe doctrines which charge men ſo ſtrictly with all manner of holineſs, and purity.

This is the way which the devil hath always uſed to *blind the eyes of men, that the light of the glori-*

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ous goſpel of Chriſt might not ſhine into them. And certainly the moſt effectual way to keep men in infidelity, is to debauch them in their lives: therefore the Apoſtle gives this as the reaſon of the infidelity of men in the laſt times, 2 Theſſ. ii. 12. *They believed not the truth, but had pleaſure in unrighteouſneſs.* When men once abandon themſelves to lewd and vicious practices, infidelity becomes their intereſt, becauſe they have no other way to defend and excuſe a wicked life, but by denying the truth which oppoſeth it, and finds fault with it.

That man only ſtands fair for the entertainment of truth, who is under the dominion of no vice, or luſt; becauſe he hath nothing to corrupt or bribe him, to ſeduce him, or draw him aſide in his enquiry after truth; he hath no intereſt but to find the truth, and follow it: he is enquiring after the way to heaven and eternal happineſs, and he hath the indifferency of a traveller which is not inclined to go this way rather than another; for his concernment is to find out the right way, and to walk in it: Such an indifferency of mind hath every good man who ſincerely deſires to do the will of God; he ſtands ready to receive truth, when ſufficient evidence is offered to convince him of it; becauſe he hath no manner of concernment that the contrary propoſition ſhould be true. As in Mathematicks, a man is ready to give his aſſent to any propoſition that is ſufficiently demonſtrated to him, becauſe he hath no inclination or affection to one ſide of the queſtion more than to the other; all his deſign and concernment is to find out the truth on which ſide ſoever it lies; and he is like to find it, becauſe he is ſo indifferent and impartial. But if a man be biaſſed by any luſt, and addicted to any vicious practice, he is then an intereſted perſon, and concerned to be partial in his judgment of things, and is under a great temptation to infidelity when the truths of God are propoſed to him; becauſe whatever the evidence for them be, he cannot but be unwilling to own the truth of that doctrine, which is ſo contrary to his inclination and intereſt. If the affections and intereſts of men were

as deeply concerned, and as sensibly touched in the truth of mathematical propositions, as they are in the principles of morality and religion, we should find, that when a proposition stood in their way, and lay cross to their interest, though it were never so clearly demonstrated, yet they would raise a dust about it, and make a thousand cavils, and fence even against the evidence of a demonstration; they would palliate their error with all the skill and art they could, and though the absurdity of it was never so great and palpable, yet they would hold it fast against all sense and reason, and face down mankind in the obstinate defence of it. For we have no reason to doubt but that they who, in matters of religion, will believe directly contrary to what they see, would, if they had the same interests and passions to sway them in the case, believe contrary to the clearest mathematical demonstration; for where there is an obstinate resolution not to be convinced, all the reason and evidence in the world signifies nothing.

Whereas he that is biassed by no passion or interest, but hath an honest mind, and is sincerely desirous to do the will of God, so far as he knows it, is likely to judge very impartially concerning any doctrines that are propos'd to him: For if there be not good evidence that they are from God, he hath no reason to deceive himself, in giving credit to them; and if there be good evidence that they are divine, he hath no interest or inclination to reject them; for it being his great design to do the will of God, he is glad of all opportunities to come to the knowledge of it, that he may do it.

Thus you see how a sincere desire and endeavour to obey the will of God, does secure men against fatal errors and mistakes in matters of religion; because such persons are hereby better dispos'd to make a right judgment of divine things, both because they have truer and surer notions of God and religion, and are more impartial in their search and enquiry after truth. This is the first account.

II. Another reason why they who sincerely desire to do the will of God, have a great security in discerning

cerning truth from error, is, becauſe the providence of God is more eſpecially concerned to preſerve ſuch perſons from dangerous errors and miſtakes in things which concern their eternal ſalvation. When men are of a teachable temper, God loves to reveal himſelf and his truth to them; and ſuch is an humble and obedient frame of mind, Pſal. xxv. 9. *The meek will he guide in judgment; the meek will he teach his way.* The proper diſpoſition of a ſcholar, is to be willing to learn; and that which in religion we are to learn is, *what is the good and acceptable will of God,* that we may *do it,* for practice is the end of knowledge. *If you know theſe things* (ſays our bleſſed Lord) *happy are ye if ye do them.* It is neceſſary *to know the will of God*; becauſe we are happy only in *the doing of it:* and, *if any man be deſirous to do the will of God,* his goodneſs is ſuch, that he will take effectual care to ſecure ſuch an one againſt dangerous and fatal errors. He that hath an honeſt mind, and would do the will of God if he knew it, God will not ſuffer him to remain ignorant of it, or to be miſtaken about it, in any neceſſary points of faith and practice.

St. Paul is a wonderful inſtance of the goodneſs of God in this kind. He was undoubtedly a man of a very honeſt mind; he had entertained the Jewiſh religion, as revealed by God, and been bred in it; and, out of a blind reverence and belief of his teachers, who rejected Chriſt and his doctrine, he likewiſe oppoſed and perſecuted them with a mighty zeal and an honeſt intention, being *verily perſuaded* (as he himſelf tells us) *that he ought to do* what he did, *againſt the name of Jeſus of Nazareth*; he was under a great prejudice upon account of his education, and according to the heat of his natural temper, tranſported with great paſſion: but becauſe he did what he did, ignorantly, and in unbelief, God was pleaſed to ſhew mercy to him, and, in a miraculous manner, to convince him of the truth of that religion which he perſecuted. He was ſincerely deſirous to do the will of God, and therefore God would rather work a miracle for his

converſion, than ſuffer him to go on in ſo fatal a miſtake concerning the Chriſtian religion.

And as the providence of God doth concern itſelf to ſecure good men from dangerous errors and miſtakes in matters of religion; ſo, by a juſt judgment, he gives up thoſe who allow themſelves in vicious practices, to error and infidelity. And this is the meaning of that paſſage of the Prophet Iſa. vi. 10. ſo often cited by our Saviour, and applied to the Jews, of *making the heart of that people fat, and their ears heavy, and cloſing their eyes, leſt they ſhould underſtand and be converted.* So again, Iſa. lxvi. 3, 4. God threatens the people of Iſrael, that becauſe they were wicked and abominable in their lives, he would abandon them, and give them over to a ſpirit of deluſion; *they have choſen their own ways, and their ſoul delighteth in their abominations; I alſo will chooſe their deluſions.* God is ſaid to chooſe thoſe things for us, which he permits us to fall into: So Rom. i. 28. God is ſaid to *give over* the abominable heathen to *a reprobate mind. As they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over* εἰς ἀδόκιμον νοῦν, *to an injudicious and undiſcerning mind.* When men abandon themſelves to wickedneſs and impiety, God withdraws his grace from them; and by his ſecret and juſt judgment they are deprived of the faculty of diſcerning between truth and error, between good evil, 2 Theſſ. ii. 10, 11, 12. it is ſaid, that *the man of ſin ſhould come with all deceivableneſs of unrighteouſneſs in them that periſh, becauſe they received not the love of the truth, that they might be ſaved:* And that *for this cauſe, God would ſend them ſtrong deluſion, that they ſhould believe a lie; that they might all be damned, who believed not the truth, but had pleaſure in unrighteouſneſs.* And it is juſt with God, that men of vicious inclinations and practices ſhould be expoſed to the cheat of the groſſeſt and vileſt impoſtures. God's providence is concerned for men of honeſt minds, and ſincere intentions: But if men *take pleaſure in unrighteouſneſs*, God takes no further care of them, but *delivers them up to their own hearts luſts*, to be

be ſeduced into all thoſe errors, into which their own *vain imaginations*, and *fooliſh hearts* are apt to lead them.

Thus have I endeavoured, as briefly as I could, to ſhew that an honeſt mind, that ſincerely deſires and endeavours to do the will of God, is the beſt ſecurity againſt fatal errors and miſtakes in matters of religion; both becauſe it diſpoſeth a man to make a true judgment of divine things, and becauſe the providence of God is more eſpecially concerned for the ſecurity of ſuch perſons.

There remains an objection to be anſwered, to which this diſcourſe may ſeem liable; but this together with the inferences which may be made from this diſcourſe, I ſhall refer to another opportunity.

SERMON LXXXVIII.

Honeſty the beſt preſervative againſt dangerous miſtakes in religion.

JOHN vii. 17.

If any man will do his will, he ſhall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I ſpeak of myſelf.

The ſecond ſermon on this text.

I Made entrance into theſe words the laſt day; in which our Saviour declares to us, that an honeſt and ſincere mind, and an hearty deſire and endeavour to do the will of God, is the beſt ſecurity and preſervative againſt dangerous errors and miſtakes in matters of religion; ἐάν τις θέλῃ ποιεῖν, *if any man deſire to do his will, he ſhall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I ſpeak of myſelf.*

Now there are (I told you) two great miſtakes in religion; *To reject any thing which really is from*

God; and *to receive and entertain any thing as from God, which is not really from him.* And therefore I propoſed from this text to ſhew how a ſincere deſire and endeavour to do the will of God, is a ſecurity to men againſt both theſe dangers, namely, upon theſe two accounts.

Firſt, Becauſe he who ſincerely deſires and endeavours to do the will of God, is hereby better qualified and diſpoſed to make a right judgment of ſpiritual and divine things; and that for theſe two reaſons:

I. Becauſe ſuch a perſon hath a truer notion of God and divine things. He that reſembleth God moſt, is like to underſtand him beſt, becauſe he finds thoſe perfections, in ſome meaſure, in himſelf, which he contemplates in the divine nature; and nothing gives a man ſo ſure a notion of things, as practice and experience.

II. Becauſe ſuch a perſon is more impartial in his ſearch and enquiry after truth, and therefore more likely to find it, and to diſcern it from error. That man only ſtands fair for the entertainment of truth, who is under the power and dominion of no vice or luſt, becauſe he hath nothing to corrupt or bribe him, to ſeduce and draw him aſide in his enquiry after truth: He hath no manner of concernment that the contrary propoſition ſhould be true, having the indifferency of a traveller, and no other intereſt, but to find out the right way to heaven, and to walk in it. But if a man be biaſſed by any luſt, and addicted to any vicious practice, he is then an intereſted perſon, and concerned to make a partial judgment of things, and is under a great temptation to infidelity, when the truths of God are propoſed to him; becauſe, whatever the evidence for them be, he cannot but be unwilling to own the truths of thoſe doctrines, which are ſo contrary to his inclination and intereſt.

Secondly, Another reaſon why they who ſincerely deſire to do the will of God, have a greater ſecurity in diſcerning truth from error, is, becauſe the providence of God is more eſpecially concerned to preſerve

ſerve ſuch perſons from dangerous errors and miſtakes, in things which concern their eternal ſalvation. When men are of a teachable temper, of an humble and obedient frame of mind, God loves to reveal himſelf, and his truth to them, Pſal. xxv. 9. *The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way.* The proper diſpoſition of a ſcholar, is to be willing to learn; and that which in religion we are to learn, is, *what is the good and acceptable will of God, that we may do it*; for practice is the end of knowledge; *if ye know theſe things* (ſaith our Saviour) *happy are ye if ye do them.* It is neceſſary to know the will of God; but we are only happy in the doing of it; and if any man be deſirous to do the will of God, his goodneſs is ſuch, that he will take effectual care to ſecure ſuch an one againſt dangerous and fatal errors. He that hath an honeſt mind, and would do the will of God, if he knew it, God will not ſuffer him to remain ignorant of it, or to be miſtaken about it, in any neceſſary point of faith or practice. Thus far I have gone.

I ſhall now proceed to remove an objection, to which this diſcourſe may ſeem liable, and then draw ſome inferences from the whole.

After all that hath been ſaid, ſome perhaps may ask, Is every good man then ſecure from all error and miſtake in matters of religion? This is a mighty privilege indeed: But do not we find the contrary in experience? that an honeſt heart and a weak head, do often meet together?

For anſwer to this, I ſhall lay down theſe following propoſitions.

Firſt, That if there were any neceſſity, that a good man ſhould be ſecured from all manner of error and miſtake in religion, this probity of mind, and ſincere deſire to do the will of God, is the beſt way to do it; becauſe ſuch a temper and diſpoſition of mind gives a man the beſt advantages to diſcern betwixt truth and error; and God is moſt likely to reveal his will to ſuch perſons. But there is no neceſſity of this, becauſe a man may be a good man, and go to heaven, notwithſtanding a great many miſtakes in

religion about things not neceſſary. For while we are in this imperfect ſtate, *we know but in part*, and ſee many things very imperfectly: But when we ſhall come into a more perfect ſtate, *that which is imperfect ſhall be done away*; the light of glory ſhall ſcatter all thoſe miſts and clouds, which are now upon our underſtandings, and hinder us from a clear ſight and judgment of things; we ſhall then ſee God, and other things as they are; and be freed from all that ignorance, and thoſe many childiſh miſtakes which we are liable to here below; and till then, it is not neceſſary that we ſhould be ſecured from them. Humility, under a ſenſe of our ignorance, is better for us, than infallibility would be.

Secondly, This temper and diſpoſition of mind which I have been ſpeaking of, is a certain ſecurity againſt fatal miſtakes in religion, and a final continuance in ſuch errors as would prove damnable; and this is all that this diſcourſe pretends to, or our Saviour hath promiſed in this text. And conſidering the goodneſs of God, nothing is more improbable, than that an honeſt mind that ſeeks impartially after truth, ſhould miſs of it, in things that are fundamentally neceſſary to ſalvation. And if we could ſuppoſe ſuch a man to fall into ſuch an error, either it would not be fundamental to him, having not been, perhaps, propoſed to him with ſufficient evidence, and would be forgiven him upon a general repentance for all ſins and errors known, or unknown; or he would not be permitted to continue in it; but the providence of God would find out ſome way or other to convince him of his error, and to bring him *to the acknowledgment of the truth, that he might be ſaved*. God would rather ſpeak to him immediately from heaven, (as he did to St. Paul) than ſuffer him to continue in ſuch an error as would infallibly carry him to hell.

Thirdly, There is no ſuch depth of judgment, and ſubtilty of wit required to diſcern between groſs and damnable errors in religion, and neceſſary and ſaving truth, but that an ordinary capacity may be able to do it. There is ſo plain a line drawn be-

tween

tween great truth and groſs errors, that it is viſible to every capacity; and an ordinary underſtanding that is not under a violent prejudice, or blinded by ſome vice or fault of the will, may eaſily diſcern it. Indeed, in matters of leſſer moment and concernment, and which have no ſuch conſiderable and immediate influence upon the practice of an holy life, the difference betwixt truth and error is not always ſo groſs and ſenſible, as to be obvious to every unprejudiced eye. But we have all the reaſon in the world to believe, that the goodneſs and juſtice of God is ſuch, as to make nothing neceſſary to be believed by any man, which, by the help of due inſtruction, may not be made ſufficiently plain to a common underſtanding. God hath ſo tender a care of good men, who ſincerely love him and his truth, that we may reaſonably preſume, that he will not leave them under an unavoidable miſtake concerning thoſe matters upon which their eternal ſalvation does depend. *The judge of all the world will do right*; and then we may certainly conclude, that he will not condemn any man for no fault, and make him for ever miſerable, for falling into an error, which with all his care and diligence, he could not poſſibly either diſcern or avoid.

Fourthly, God hath made abundant proviſion for our ſecurity from fatal and dangerous errors in religion, by theſe three ways:

I. By an infallible rule, ſufficiently plain in all things neceſſary.

II. By ſufficient means of inſtruction, to help us to underſtand this rule.

III. By an infallible promiſe of ſecurity from dangerous errors and miſtakes, if with an honeſt mind and due diligence we apply our ſelves to underſtand this rule, and make uſe of the means of inſtruction, which God hath provided for that purpoſe.

I. God hath given us an infallible rule, ſufficiently plain in all things neceſſary. He hath given us the holy ſcriptures, which were given at firſt by divine inſpiration, *i. e.* by men infallibly aſſiſted in the writing of them, and therefore muſt needs be an infallible

fallible rule; and *all ſcripture*, divinely inſpired, *is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for inſtruction in righteouſneſs*, as St. Paul tells us, 2 Tim. iii. 16. ſpeaking there of the books of the Old Teſtament; and there is the ſame reaſon as to the inſpired writings of the New.

Now, if the ſcriptures be an infallible rule, and *profitable for doctrine and inſtruction in righteouſneſs*, *i. e.* to teach us to believe and do; it follows of neceſſity that they are ſufficiently plain in all things neceſſary to faith and a good life; otherwiſe they could not be *uſeful for doctrine and inſtruction in righteouſneſs*: for a rule that is not plain to us in theſe things, in which it is neceſſary for us to be directed by it, is of no uſe to us; that is in truth, it is no rule. For a rule muſt have theſe two properties; it muſt be perfect, and it muſt be plain. The ſcriptures are a perfect rule, becauſe the writers of them, being divinely inſpired, were infallible: And they muſt likewiſe be plain; otherwiſe, though they be never ſo perfect, they can be of no more uſe to direct our faith and practice, than a ſun-dial in a dark room is to tell us the hour of the day: For though it be never ſo exactly made, unleſs the ſun ſhine clearly upon it, we had as good be without it. A rule that is not plain to us, whatever it may be in itſelf, is of no uſe at all to us till it be made plain, and we underſtand it.

II. God hath likewiſe provided ſufficient means of inſtruction to help us to underſtand this rule. It is not neceſſary that a rule ſhould be ſo plain that we ſhould perfectly underſtand it at firſt ſight; it is ſufficient if it be ſo plain that thoſe of better capacity and underſtanding may, with due diligence and application of mind, come to the true knowledge of it, and thoſe of a lower and more ordinary capacity by the help and inſtruction of a teacher. Euclid's Elements is a book ſufficiently plain to teach a man Geometry, but yet not ſo plain that any man at firſt reading ſhould underſtand it perfectly; but that by diligent reading, by a due application, and ſteady attention of mind, a man of extraordinary ſagacity and underſtanding may come to underſtand the

the principles and demonſtrations of it; and thoſe of a more ordinary capacity with the help of a teacher, may come to the knowledge of it. So, when we ſay that the ſcriptures are plain in all things neceſſary to faith and a good life, we do not mean that every man at firſt hearing or reading of theſe things in it, ſhall perfectly underſtand them; but by diligent reading and conſideration, if he be of good apprehenſion and capacity, he may come to a ſufficient knowledge of them; and if he be of a meaner capacity, and be willing to learn, he may, by the help of a teacher, be brought to underſtand them without any great pains; and ſuch teachers God hath appointed in his church for this very purpoſe, and a ſucceſſion of them to continue to the end of the world.

In a word, when we ſay the ſcriptures are plain to all capacities, in all things neceſſary, we mean, that any man of ordinary capacity, by his own diligence and care, in conjunction with the helps and advantages which God hath appointed, and in the due uſe of them, may attain to the knowledge of every thing neceſſary to his ſalvation; and that there is no book in the world more plain, and better fitted to teach a man any art or ſcience, than the Bible is to direct and inſtruct men in the way to heaven; and it is every man's fault if he be ignorant of any thing neceſſary for him to believe, or do, in order to his eternal happineſs.

III. Good men are likewiſe ſecured from fatal errors in religion, by the infallible promiſe of God, if ſo be that with honeſt minds and due diligence they apply themſelves to the underſtanding of this rule, and make uſe of the means of inſtruction which God hath provided for that purpoſe. God hath promiſed *to guide and teach the humble and meek*; that is, ſuch as are of a ſubmiſſive and teachable temper, deſirous and diligent to be inſtructed in the truth. Prov. ii. 3. 4. 5. *If thou incline thine ear to wiſdom, and apply thine heart to underſtanding; yea, if thou crieſt after knowledge, and lifteſt up thy voice for underſtanding; if thou ſeekeſt her as ſilver, and ſearcheſt*

eſt for her as for hid treaſures; then ſhalt thou underſtand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. And here in the text our Saviour aſſures us, that *if any man be deſirous to do his will, he ſhall know of the doctrine, whether it be of* God, *or whether he ſpake of himſelf*; *i. e.* he ſhall be able to diſcern the doctrines which are from God.

This is the proviſion which God hath made for our ſecurity from fatal miſtakes in religion; and this is in all reſpects a better ſecurity, and more likely to guide and conduct us ſafely to heaven, than any *infallible church*; and that for theſe reaſons:

Firſt, Becauſe it is much more certain that God hath made this proviſion which I have mentioned, than that there is an infallible church appointed and aſſiſted by him to this purpoſe. That the ſcriptures are an infallible and adequate rule, and ſufficiently plain in all things neceſſary, I have already proved; and I add further, that this was the conſtant judgment of the ancient church, and ſo declared by the unanimous conſent of the fathers of it for many ages; and that all councils in their determination of faith proceeded upon this rule, till the ſecond council of Nice.

I have likewiſe proved, that God hath provided a ſucceſſion of paſtors and teachers in his church, to inſtruct us in this rule; and that we have God's infallible promiſe for our ſecurity from dangerous errors and miſtakes, if with an honeſt mind and due diligence we apply ourſelves to underſtand this rule, and make uſe of the means of inſtruction which God hath provided for that purpoſe.

But that there is an infallible church appointed and aſſiſted by God, to declare and determine matters of faith, and to be an infallible interpreter of ſcripture, is not certain, becauſe there is no clear and expreſs text of ſcripture to that purpoſe, that any church whatſoever, much leſs that the church of Rome hath this power and privilege.

Nay, I add further, that it is impoſſible, according to the principles of the church of Rome, that this ſhould be proved from ſcripture; becauſe, according

cording to their principles, we cannot know either which are the true books of ſcripture, or what is the true ſenſe of ſcripture, but from the authority and infallible declaration of that church. And if ſo, then the infallibility of the church muſt be firſt known, and proved, before we can either know the ſcriptures or the ſenſe of them; and yet till we know the ſcriptures, and the ſenſe of them, nothing can be proved by them. Now to pretend to prove the infallibility of their church by ſcripture, and at the ſame time to declare, that which are the true books of ſcripture, and what is the true ſenſe of them, can only be proved by the infallible authority of their church, is a plain and ſhameful circle, out of which there is no way to eſcape; and conſequently that God hath appointed an infallible church is impoſſible, according to their principles, ever to be proved from ſcripture, and the thing is capable of no other proof. For that God will infallibly aſſiſt any ſociety of men, is not to be known but by divine revelation. So that unleſs they can prove it by ſome other revelation than that of ſcripture (which they do not pretend to) the thing is not to be proved at all. Yes, they ſay, by the notes and marks of the true church; but what thoſe marks are, muſt either be known from ſcripture, or ſome other divine revelation, and then the ſame difficulty returns; beſides that one of the moſt eſſential marks of the true church muſt be the profeſſion of the true faith; and then it muſt firſt be known which is the true faith, before we can know which is the true church; and yet they ſay, that no man can learn the true faith, but from the true church; and this runs them unavoidably into another circle as ſhameful as the other. So that which way ſoever they go to prove an infallible church, they are ſhut up in a plain circle, and muſt either prove the ſcriptures by the church, and the church by the ſcriptures, or the true church by the true faith, and the true faith by the true church.

Secondly, This proviſion and ſecurity which I have mentioned, is more human, better accommodated and ſuited to the nature of man; becauſe it doth

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not ſuppoſe and need a ſtanding and perpetual miracle, as the other way of an infallible church doth. All inſpiration is ſupernatural and miraculous, and this infallible aſſiſtance which the church of Rome claims to herſelf, muſt either be ſuch as the Apoſtles had, which was by immediate inſpiration, or ſomething equal to it, and alike ſupernatural: But God does not work miracles without need, or continue them when there is no occaſion for them. When God delivered the law to the people of Iſrael, it was accompanied with miracles, and the prophets which he ſent to them from time to time, had an immediate inſpiration; but their ſupreme judicature, or their general council, which they call the Sanhedrim, was not infallibly aſſiſted in the expounding of the law, when doubts and difficulties aroſe about it; no, nor in judging of true and falſe prophets; but they determined this and all other emergent caſes, by the ſtanding revelation and rule of their written law; and that they were not infallibly aſſiſted, is evident from the great errors they fell into, in *making void the commandments of God by their traditions*, and in their rejecting and crucifying the true Meſſias and the Son of God.

In like manner the Apoſtles and firſt teachers of the Chriſtian religion were immediately inſpired, and miraculouſly aſſiſted in the publiſhing of the Chriſtian doctrine, and for the ſpeedy and more effectual propagating and planting of it in the world, in deſpite of the violent prejudices that were againſt it, and the fierce oppoſition that was made to it. But when this was done, this miraculous and extraordinary aſſiſtance ceaſed, and God left the Chriſtian religion to be preſerved and continued by more human and ordinary ways; the doctrines of it being committed to writing for a ſtanding rule of faith and practice in all ages, and an order of men appointed to inſtruct people in thoſe doctrines, with a promiſe to ſecure both teachers and people, that ſincerely deſire to know and do the will of God, from all fatal errors and miſtakes about things neceſſary to their eternal ſalvation: and this is a proviſion more likely

ly to be made by God, and better ſuited to the nature of man, than the perpetual and needleſs miracle of an inſpired, or any otherwiſe infallible church.

Thirdly, This way is likewiſe more agreeable to the nature of religion, and the virtue of faith. The deſign of an infallible church is to ſecure all that continue in the communion of it, againſt all poſſibility of error in matters of faith. The queſtion now is not, whether an infallible church would do this? but whether that church which arrogates infallibility to itſelf does not pretend to do this? And if they could do it, it would not be agreeable to the nature of religion, and the virtue of faith. For faith, which is the principle of all religious actions, would be no virtue, if it were neceſſary. A true and right belief can be no virtue, where a man is infallibly ſecured againſt error. There is the ſame reaſon of virtuous and criminal actions; and as there can be no crime or fault in doing what a man cannot help, ſo neither can there be any virtue. All virtuous actions are matter of praiſe and commendation; and therefore it can be no virtue in any man, becauſe it deſerves no commendation, to believe and own that the ſun ſhines at noon-day, when he ſees it does ſo. No more would it be a virtue in any man, and deſerve praiſe, to believe aright, who is in a church wherein he is infallibly ſecured againſt all errors in matters of faith. Make any thing neceſſary, and impoſſible to be otherwiſe, and the doing of it ceaſes to be a virtue. God hath ſo framed religion, and the evidence of truth, and the means of coming to the knowledge of it, as to be a ſufficient ſecurity to men of honeſt minds and teachable tempers, againſt all fatal and final miſtakes concerning things neceſſary to ſalvation; but not ſo, that every man that is of ſuch a church, ſhould be infallibly ſecured againſt all errors in matters of faith; and this on purpoſe to try the virtue and diſpoſition of men, whether they will be at the pains to ſearch for truth, and when it is propoſed to them with ſufficient evidence, though not by an infallible hand, they will *receive it in the love of it, that they may be ſaved.*

Fourthly, This is as much ſecurity againſt errors in matters of faith, as God hath provided againſt ſin and vice in matters of practice; and ſince a right belief is only in order to a good life, a man would be hard put to it, to give a wiſe reaſon why God ſhould take greater care for the infallible ſecurity of mens faith than of their obedience. The reaſon pretended why God ſhould make ſuch infallible proviſion for a right faith, is, for the better ſecurity of mens eternal ſalvation and happineſs. Now the virtues of a good life have a more direct and immediate influence upon that, than the moſt orthodox belief. *The end of the commandment, (i. e.* of the declaration of the goſpel) *is charity*. In the Chriſtian religion that which mainly avails to our juſtification and ſalvation is, *a faith that worketh by charity*, and *the keeping of the commandments of God. He that heareth theſe ſayings of mine, and doth them* (ſaith our bleſſed Lord) *I will liken him to a wiſe man that built his houſe upon a rock*; and again, *not every one that ſaith unto me, Lord, Lord, (i. e.* makes profeſſion of faith in me) *ſhall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doth the will of my father which is in heaven*; and again, *if ye know theſe things, happy are ye if ye do them*. And the Apoſtle St. Peter exhorts Chriſtians, to *add to their faith knowledge, and virtue, and godlineſs, and brotherly kindneſs, and charity, that ſo an abundant entrance may be miniſtred to them, into the everlaſting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt*. So that the virtues of a good life have the greateſt influence upon our ſalvation, and the main ſtreſs of Chriſtianity is to be laid there. And therefore whatever reaſon can be aſſigned, why God ſhould provide for the infallible ſecurity of our faith, is much ſtronger, why an equal proviſion ſhould be made to ſecure holineſs, and obedience of life; becauſe without this, faith cannot infallibly attain its end, which is, *the ſalvation of our ſouls*. But this it is granted God hath not done, and experience ſhews it; and therefore it is unreaſonable to ſuppoſe that he hath done the other. It is ſufficient, that in both kinds

kinds he hath done that which is ſufficient to make us capable of happineſs, if we be not wanting to ourſelves; the reſt he hath left to the ſincerity of our endeavours, expecting that we on our part *ſhould work out our ſalvation with fear and trembling*, and *give all diligence to make our calling and election ſure.* And if God hath made ſuch proviſion by the goſpel for all that enjoy the light and advantage of it, that none can miſcarry without their own fault, then both his goodneſs and wiſdom are ſufficiently acquitted, without an infallible guide and judge in matters of faith; and that irreverent way of arguing in the Canon law might well have been ſpared, that of neceſſity there muſt be an infallible judge of controverſies in religion; *aliter dominus non videretur fuiſſe diſcretus, otherwiſe God would not ſeem to have ordered matters diſcreetly.*

But what infallible ſecurity ſoever they have in the church of Rome, as to matters of faith, they are certainly the worſt provided of wholſome and ſafe directions for the conſciences and lives of men, of any church in the world. No religion that I know of in the world ever had ſuch lewd and ſcandalous caſuiſts. Witneſs the moral divinity of the Jeſuits, which hath been ſo expoſed to the world, not only by thoſe of our religion, but by their own writers alſo. Nor is this miſchief only confined to that order; their caſuiſts in general, and even the more antient of them, who writ before the order of Jeſuits appeared in the world, have given ſuch a liberty and looſe to great immorality in ſeveral kinds, as is infinitely to the reproach of the beſt and pureſt religion in the world. Inſomuch that Sir Thomas More himſelf, who was a great zealot for that religion, could not forbear to make a loud complaint of it, and to paſs this ſevere cenſure upon the generality of their caſuiſts: "That their great buſineſs ſeemed "to be, not to keep men from ſin, but to teach "them *quàm propè ad peccatum liceat accedere ſine* "*peccato*; how near to ſin they might lawfully come "without ſinning." In the mean time the conſciences of men are like to be well directed, when in-

ſtead of giving men plain rules for the government of their hearts and lives, and clear reſolutions of the material doubts which frequently occur in human life, they entangle them in niceties and endleſs ſcrupuloſities, teaching them to ſplit hairs in divinity, and how with great art and cunning they may avoid the committing of any ſin, and yet come as near to it as poſſible. This is a thing of a moſt dangerous conſequence to the ſouls of men; and if men be but once encouraged to paſs to the utmoſt bounds of what is lawful, the next ſtep will be into that which is unlawful.

So that unleſs faith without works will ſave men, notwithſtanding the infallible ſecurity which they pretend to give men of a ſound and right belief, (if it were really as much as they talk of,) the ſalvation of men would ſtill be in great hazard and uncertainty, for want of better and ſafer directions for a good life, than are ordinarily to be met with in the caſuiſtical writings of that church; eſpecially if we conſider that the ſcriptures are locked up from the people in an unknown tongue, where the ſureſt and plaineſt directions for a good life are moſt plentifully to be had; inſomuch, that a man had better want all the volumes of caſuiſtical divinity that ever were written in the world, than to be without the Bible; by the diligent ſtudying of which book alone he may ſooner learn the way to heaven, than by all the books in the world without it.

Fifthly and *laſtly*, This proviſion which God hath made, is, when all is done, as good a ſecurity againſt fatal errors and miſtakes in religion, as an infallible church could give, if there were one; and it is as good a way to prevent and put an end to controverſies in religion, ſo far as it is neceſſary that they ſhould be prevented, and have an end put to them: And theſe are the two great reaſons why an infallible judge is ſo importunately demanded and inſiſted upon. I ſhall ſpeak to theſe diſtinctly and ſeverally; but becauſe they will require a longer diſcourſe than the time will allow, I ſhall not enter upon

upon them at preſent, but refer them to another opportunity.

SERMON LXXXIX.

Honeſty the beſt preſervative againſt dangerous miſtakes in religion.

JOHN vii. 17.

If any man will do his will, he ſhall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I ſpeak of myſelf.

The third ſermon on this text.

WHen I made my entrance into theſe words, I propoſed from this text,

Firſt, To ſhew that an honeſt and ſincere mind, and a hearty deſire and endeavour to do the will of God, is the greateſt ſecurity and beſt preſervative againſt dangerous errors and miſtakes in matters of religion.

In the next place, I proceeded to remove an objection, to which my diſcourſe upon this ſubject might ſeem liable. Some perhaps might ask, Is every good man then ſecure from all error and miſtake in matters of religion? This is a mighty privilege indeed. But do we not find the contrary in experience, that an honeſt heart and a weak head do often meet together? For anſwer to this I laid down ſeveral propoſitions;

By the *laſt* of which I ſhewed, that God hath made abundant proviſion for our ſecurity from fatal and dangerous errors in religion, both by the infallible rule of the holy ſcripture, and by ſufficient means of inſtruction to help us to underſtand this rule, and by his infallible promiſe of aſſiſting us, if with honeſt minds, and a due diligence, we apply ourſelves to the underſtanding of this rule, and the

uſe of theſe means. And this, I told you, was in all reſpects a better ſecurity, and more likely to conduct us ſafe to heaven, than any infallible church whatſoever; and that for *five* reaſons; *four* of which I have already treated of, and now proceed to the *fifth* and laſt, *viz.*

Becauſe this proviſion which I have ſhewn God hath made, is both as good a ſecurity againſt fatal errors and miſtakes in religion, as an infallible church could give, if there were one: And it is likewiſe as good a way to prevent and put an end to controverſies in religion, ſo far as it is neceſſary they ſhould be prevented, or have an end put to them. And theſe are the two great reaſons why an infallible judge is ſo importunately demanded and inſiſted upon. I ſhall ſpeak to theſe two points diſtinctly and ſeverally.

Firſt, Becauſe this is as good a ſecurity againſt fatal errors and miſtakes in religion, as an infallible church could give, if there were one. For an infallible church, if there were ſuch an one upon earth, could not infallibly ſecure particular Chriſtians againſt errors in faith, any other way, than by the definition and declaration of thoſe who are infallible in that church. And there are but three that pretend to it; either the Pope, or a general council, or the Pope and a general council agreeing in the ſame definitions. Not the Pope by himſelf, nor the general council without the Pope; becauſe the church which pretends to infallibility is not agreed, that either of theſe alone is infallible, and therefore their definitions can be no certain, much leſs infallible foundation of faith; no, not to that church which pretends to infallibility. So that if there be an infallible oracle in that church, it muſt be the Pope and council in conjunction, or the definition of a council confirmed by the Pope. Now in that caſe, either the council was infallible in its definitions, before they had the Pope's confirmation, or not. If the council was infallible in its definitions, before they had the Pope's confirmation; then the council alone and of itſelf was infallible, (which a great part of the

the church of Rome deny) and then it needed not the Pope's confirmation to make it infallible: Or elſe a general council is not infallible in its definitions, before they receive the Pope's confirmation; and then the Pope's confirmation cannot make it ſo: For that which was not infallibly defined by the council, cannot be made infallible by the Pope's confirmation.

But there is another difficulty yet: It is a maxim generally received, and that even in the Roman church, "That the definitions of a general council, "confirmed by the Pope, are not obligatory, un-"leſs they be received by the univerſal church." From whence theſe two great inconveniencies will unavoidably follow.

I. That no man is obliged to believe ſuch definitions, till he certainly know that they are received by the univerſal church, which how he ſhould certainly, much leſs infallibly know, I cannot underſtand; unleſs he either ſpeak with all the Chriſtians in the world, or the repreſentatives of all particular churches return back and meet again in council, to declare, that the univerſal church hath received their definitions; which I think was never yet done.

II. It will follow, that the definitions of a general council confirmed by the Pope, are not infallible, till they be received by the univerſal church. For if they were infallible without that, they would be obligatory without it; becauſe an infallible definition, if we know it to be ſo, lays an obligation to believe it, whether it be received by the univerſal church, or not. And if ſuch definitions are not infallible till they be received by the univerſal church, they cannot become infallible afterwards; becauſe if the definitions were not infallible before, they cannot be received as ſuch by the univerſal church, nor by the mere reception of them, be made to be infallible definitions, if they were not ſo before.

But if we ſhould paſs over all theſe difficulties, there is a greater yet behind, and that is, ſuppoſing the definitions of general councils confirmed by the Pope to be infallible, particular Chriſtians cannot be

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ſecured infallibly from error without the knowledge of thoſe definitions. And there are but two ways imaginable of conveying this knowledge to them: either by the living voice of their particular paſtors, whom they are implicitely to believe in theſe matters; but particular paſtors are fallible (as they themſelves grant) and therefore their words can neither be an infallible foundation of faith, or an infallible means of conveying it; and it is unreaſonable, they ſay, for men that own themſelves to be fallible, to require an impliçite belief to be given to them: or elſe the knowledge of the definitions of councils muſt be conveyed to particular Chriſtians by writing, and if ſo, then there will only be an infallible rule, but no living infallible judge. And if an infallible rule will ſerve the turn, we have the ſcriptures which we are ſure are infallible, and therefore at leaſt as good as any other rule. But they ſay, that the definitions of councils give us an infallible interpretation of ſcripture, and therefore are of greater advantage to us. But do not the definitions of councils ſometimes alſo need explication, that we may know the certain ſenſe of them, without which we cannot know the doctrines defined? Yes certainly, they need explication as much as ſcripture, if there be any difference about the meaning of them; and there have been, and ſtill are, great differences among thoſe of their own church about the meaning of them. And if the explications of general councils need themſelves to be explained, then there is nothing got by them, and we are but where we were before: For differences about the meaning of the definitions of general councils, make as great difficulties and uncertainties in faith, as the differences about the meaning of ſcripture.

Well, but the people have the living voice of their particular paſtors to explain the definitions of councils to them. But this does not help the matter neither, for theſe two reaſons:

1. Becauſe particular paſtors have no authority to explain the definitions of general councils. The council of Trent hath, by expreſs decree, reſerved

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to the Pope, and to him only, the power to explain the definitions of the council, if any difference ariſe about the meaning of them. So that if there be any difference about the true ſenſe and meaning of any of the definitions of the council, particular paſtors have no authority to explain them; and where there is no doubt or difference about the meaning of them, there is no occaſion for the explication of them.

2. But ſuppoſe they had authority to explain them, this can be no infallible ſecurity to the people, that they explain them right; both becauſe particular paſtors are fallible, and likewiſe becauſe we ſee in experience that they differ in their explications; witneſs the Biſhop of Condom's expoſition of the catholick faith, and of the definitions of the council of Trent, which is in many material points very different from that of Bellarmine, and many other famous doctors of that church. And which is more, witneſs the many differences betwixt Ambroſius, Catharinus, and Dominicus à Soto, about the definitions of that council, in which they were both preſent, and heard the debates, and themſelves bore a great part in them. Now, if they who were preſent at the framing of the definitions of that council cannot agree about the meaning of them, much leſs can it be expected from thoſe that were abſent.

Secondly, This proviſion which I have mentioned, is likewiſe as good a way to prevent and put an end to controverſies in religion, ſo far as it is neceſſary they ſhould be prevented, or have an end put to them, as any infallible church would be, if there were one. And this is another reaſon why an infallible church is ſo much inſiſted upon, that there may be ſome way and means for a final deciſion of controverſies, which the ſcriptures cannot be, becauſe they are only a dead rule, which can end no controverſy without a living judge ready at hand, to interpret and apply that rule upon emergent occaſions.

It is not neceſſary that all controverſies in religion ſhould either be prevented, or decided: This the church which pretends to be infallible cannot pretend to have done; becauſe there are manifold controverſies

ſies, even in the church of Rome herſelf, concerning matters of religion, which ſtill remain undecided; and in their commentaries upon ſcripture, many differences about the ſenſe of ſeveral texts concerning which ſhe hath not thought fit to give an infallible interpretation. And where their Popes, and ſeveral of their general councils, have thought fit to meddle with ſcripture, they have applied and interpreted texts more improperly and abſurdly than even their private doctors. And, which is more, in differences about points of faith, which are pretended on both ſides to be fundamental, this church hath not thought fit to put an end to them by her infallible deciſion, after two hundred years brangling about them. For inſtance, in that fierce and long difference about the immaculate conception of the bleſſed virgin, which, on both ſides, is pretended to be an article of faith, and for which, contrary revelations of their canonized ſaints are ſo frequently pretended; and yet neither Pope, nor general council, have thought fit to exert their infallibility for the deciſion of this controverſy. So that if their church had this talent of infallibility ever committed to them, they have, with the ſlothful ſervant, *laid it up in a napkin*; and according to our Saviour's rule have long ſince forfeited it, for not making uſe of it.

And whereas it is pretended that the ſcripture is but a dead rule, which can end no controverſies without a living judge ready at hand, to interpret and apply that rule upon emergent occaſions; the ſame objection lies againſt them, unleſs a general council, which is their living judge, were always ſitting; for the definitions of their councils in writing are liable to the ſame, and greater objections than the written rule of the ſcriptures.

The ſum of all is this. In differences about leſſer matters, mutual charity and forbearance will ſecure the peace of the church, though the differences remain undecided; and in greater matters, an infallible rule ſearched into with an honeſt mind, and due diligence, and with the help of good inſtruction, is more likely to extinguiſh and put an end to ſuch differences,

ferences, than any infallible judge, if there were one; becauſe an humble and honeſt mind is more likely to yield to reaſon, than a perverſe and cavilling temper is to ſubmit to the ſentence of an infallible judge, unleſs it were backed with an inquiſition. The church of Rome ſuppoſeth herſelf infallible, and yet notwithſtanding that, ſhe finds that ſome queſtion and deny her infallibility, and then her ſentence ſignifies nothing. And of thoſe who own it, many diſpute the ſenſe and meaning of her ſentence; and whether they deny the infallibility of her ſentence, or diſpute the ſenſe of it, in neither of theſe caſes will it prove effectual to the deciding of any difference.

But after all this proviſion which we pretend God hath made for honeſt and ſincere minds, do we not ſee that men fall into dangerous and damnable errors, who yet cannot, without great uncharitableneſs, be ſuppoſed not to be ſincerely deſirous to know the truth, and to do the will of God?

To this I ſhall briefly return theſe two things:

I. That the ſame errors are not equally damnable to all. The innocent, and (humanly ſpeaking) almoſt invincible prejudices of education in ſome perſons even againſt a fundamental truth; the different capacities of men, and the different means of conviction afforded to them; the greater and leſſer degrees of obſtinacy, and a faulty will in oppoſing the truths propoſed to them; all theſe, and perhaps ſeveral other conſiderations beſides, may make a great difference in the guilt of mens errors, and the danger of them.

II. When all is done, the matter muſt be left to God, who only knoweth the hearts of the children of men. We cannot ſee into the hearts of men, nor know all their circumſtances, and how they may have provoked God to forſake them, and give them up to error and deluſion, *becauſe they would not receive the truth in the love of it, that they might be ſaved.* And as on the one hand God will conſider all mens circumſtances, and the diſadvantages they were under for coming to the knowledge of the truth, and make allowance to men for their invincible errors;

rors, and forgive them upon a general repentance: So on the other hand, he who sees the insincerity of men, and that the errors of their understandings did proceed from gross faults of their lives, will deal with them accordingly. But if men be honest and sincere, God, who hath said, *if any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine*, will certainly be as good as his word.

It now remains only to draw some inferences from this discourse, and they shall be these three:

First, From this text, and what hath been discoursed upon it, we may infer how slender and ill-grounded the pretence of the church of Rome to infallibility is, whether they place it in the Pope, or in a general council, or in both. The last is the most general opinion; and yet it is hard to understand how infallibility can result from the Pope's confirmation of a general council, when neither the council was infallible in framing its definitions, nor the Pope in confirming them. If the council were infallible in framing them, then they needed no confirmation: If they were not, then infallibility is only in the Pope that confirms them, and then it is the Pope only that is infallible. But no man that reads these words of our Saviour, *if any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine*, would ever imagine that the Bishop of Rome (whoever he shall happen to be) was secured from all fatal errors in matters of faith, much less that he were endowed with an infallible spirit in judging what doctrines are from God, and what not. For it cannot be denied, but that many of their Popes have been notoriously wicked and vicious in their lives: Nay, Bellarmine himself acknowledgeth, that for a succession of fifty Popes together, there was not one pious and virtuous man that sat in that chair; and some of their Popes have been condemned and deposed for heresy; and yet for all this, the Pope, and the governing part of that church, would bear the world in hand that he is infallible. But if this saying of our Saviour be true, *that if any man will do his will, he shall know of his doctrine, whether it be of God*; then every honest man that sincerely desires

ſires to do the will of God, hath a fairer pretence to infallibility, and a clearer text for it, than is to be found in the whole Bible, for the infallibility of the Biſhop of Rome. What would the church of Rome give, that there were but as expreſs a text in ſcripture for the infallibility of their Popes, as this is for the ſecurity of every good man, in his judgment of doctrines; which makes infallibility needleſs? What an inſufferable noiſe, and what endleſs triumphs would they make upon it, if it had been any where ſaid in the Bible, That if any man be the Biſhop of Rome, and ſit in St. Peter's chair, *he ſhall know of my doctrine whether it be of God?* Had there been but ſuch a text as this, we ſhould never have been troubled with their impertinent citation of texts, and their remote and blind inferences from *paſce oves*, and *ſuper hanc petram*; *feed my ſheep*; and *upon this rock will I build my church*; to prove the Pope's infallibility. And yet no man of ſenſe or reaſon ever extended the text I am ſpeaking to, ſo far as to attempt to prove from it the infallibility of every good man; but only his ſecurity from fatal errors and miſtakes in religion. The largeſt promiſes that are made in ſcripture of ſecurity from error and miſtake about divine things, are made to good men, who ſincerely deſire to do the will of God. And if this be ſo, we muſt conclude ſeveral Popes to have been the fartheſt from infallibility of any men in the world. And indeed there is not a more compendious way to perſuade men that the Chriſtian religion is a fable, than to ſet up a lewd and vicious man for the oracle of it.

Nay, I will go farther yet; that there are no other promiſes made in ſcripture, of direction or aſſiſtance, or ſecurity from miſtake, to any church; but the ſame are made in as full and expreſs terms to every good man that ſincerely deſires to know the truth, and to practiſe it. Is it promiſed to the church, or to the paſtors of it, *I will be with you always?* And hath not our Saviour promiſed the ſame to every one that is obedient to his word, John xiv. 23. *If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our a-*

bode with him? And does not the Apoſtle apply the ſame promiſe to every good Chriſtian, Heb. xiii. 5. *I will never leave thee nor forſake thee?* For where is the difference between theſe expreſſions? *I will be with you*, and *I will make my abode with him? I will be with you always*, and *I will never leave thee nor forſake thee?* Is it promiſed to the church, that *the Spirit ſhall lead her into all truth?* And is not the ſame promiſe made to every good man? John xiv. 21. *He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me, ſhall be loved of my father; and I will love him, and will manifeſt myſelf to him*; that is, God will reveal his will to thoſe that love him, and keep his commandments. Hath God promiſed *to build his church upon a rock?* And doth not our Saviour uſe the ſame metaphor concerning every man that doth the will of God? Matth. vii. 24. *Whoſoever heareth theſe ſayings of mine, and doth them, is like a wiſe man that built his houſe upon a rock.* So that if *to be built upon a rock* ſignifies infallibility, it belongs to every good man, who ſincerely practiſeth what he knows, as much as to any church.

When men are enabled by God to work miracles for the confirmation of the doctrines which they deliver, there is great reaſon to believe that they are infallibly aſſiſted in the delivery of thoſe doctrines: But without this, it is the vaineſt thing in the world for any perſon or church to pretend to it; becauſe they offer no evidence fit to ſatisfy any man that they are ſo aſſiſted: And I do not hear that the Pope, among all his privileges, does pretend to the power of miracles.

Secondly, From hence likewiſe we may infer the great reaſon of error and infidelity in the world. If any man be an infidel, it is not the fault of his underſtanding, but of his will; it is not becauſe there is not ſufficient evidence that the Chriſtian religion is from God, but becauſe mens intereſts and luſts make them partial and incompetent judges of matters of religion. The evidence of the Chriſtian religion is ſuch as recommends it to every man's reaſon and con-

conſcience; ſo that (as St. Paul argues) *if the goſpel be hid, it is hid to them that are loſt; in whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, leſt the light of the glorious goſpel of Chriſt, who is the image of God, ſhould ſhine unto them,* 2 Cor. iv. 3. 4.

If men did but ſtand indifferent for the entertainment of truth, and were not ſwayed by the intereſt of any luſt or paſſion, I am confident that no man that hath the goſpel fairly propoſed to him, would continue an infidel. If men did but truly live up to the principles of natural religion, they would eaſily be convinced, that the Chriſtian religion, which is ſo ſuitable thereto, is from God.

Thirdly and *laſtly*, What hath been ſaid is a great argument and encouragement to obedience, and holineſs of life. Do we deſire not to be miſtaken about the mind of God? Let us heartily endeavour to do his will. If we would not be ſeduced by the error of the wicked, let us take heed of their vicious practices. The beſt way certainly to preſerve a right judgment in matters of religion, is to take great care of a good life. God's goodneſs is ſuch, that he will not ſuffer any man's judgment to be betrayed into a damnable error, without ſome vice and fault of his will. The principles of natural religion are born with us, and imprinted upon our minds, ſo that no man can be ignorant of them, nor need to be miſtaken about them; and as for thoſe revelations which God hath made of himſelf to the world, he hath been pleaſed to accompany them with ſo much evidence, that an honeſt and ſincere mind may eaſily diſcern them from error and impoſture. So our Saviour hath aſſured us, that *if any man deſire to do his will, he ſhall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God.*

On the other hand, if we ſee any oppoſe the clear truth, or depart from it, and embrace groſs errors and deluſions, we may almoſt certainly conclude, that there is ſome worldly luſt or intereſt at the bottom of it. So our Saviour has likewiſe told us, *that* the reaſon why *men love darkneſs rather than light,* is,

becauſe their deeds are evil; and every one that doth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, leſt his deeds ſhould be reproved. I will conclude this whole diſcourſe with St. Peter's exhortation, the 2d of Pet. iii. 17, 18. *Ye therefore, beloved, ſeeing ye know theſe things before, beware, leſt ye alſo being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own ſtedfaſtneſs. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt. To him be glory, both now and for ever.* Amen.

SERMON XC.

The nature of covetouſneſs.

LUKE xii. 15.

And he ſaid unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetouſneſs; for a man's life conſiſteth not in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſeth.

AMONG all the irregular appetites of men, there is none that is more common and unreaſonable, and of a more univerſal bad influence upon the hearts and lives of men, than this of covetouſneſs; and therefore, in ſpeaking of this vice, I ſhall ſtrike at the root of a great many others; even of apoſtacy from God's truth and religion, of which covetouſneſs, and the love of this preſent world, is one of the moſt common cauſes. So that if I can contribute any thing to the cure of this great diſtemper of men's minds, I ſhall in ſo doing remove that, which is the cauſe and occaſion of a great part of the evils and miſchiefs which are in the world. And to this end I have pitched upon theſe words of our bleſſed Saviour to his hearers; *And he ſaid unto them, take heed and beware of covetouſneſs; for a man's life conſiſteth not in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſeth.*

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In which words are theſe three things obſervable:

Firſt, The manner of the caution which our Saviour here gives, *take heed and beware*; he doubles it, to ſhew the great need and concernment of it.

Secondly, The matter of the caution, or the vice which our Saviour here warns his hearers againſt, and that is covetouſneſs; *take heed and beware of covetouſneſs.*

Thirdly, The reaſon of this caution, *becauſe a man's life conſiſteth not in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſeth.* Human life is ſuſtained by a little, and therefore abundance is not neceſſary, either to the ſupport or comfort of it. 'Tis not a great eſtate and vaſt poſſeſſions that make a man happy in this world; but a mind that is equal to its condition, whatever it be.

Firſt, The manner of the caution which our Saviour here gives, *take heed and beware.* This is a peculiar kind of caution, and no where elſe, or upon any other occaſion that I know of, uſed in ſcripture; in which, for the greater emphaſis and weight, the words of caution are doubled, as if the matter were of ſo much concerment, that no caution about it could be too much; to ſignify to us both the great danger of this ſin of covetouſneſs, and the great care men ought to uſe to preſerve themſelves from it.

I. The great danger of this ſin; how apt we are to fall into this vice, and of how pernicious a conſequence it is to thoſe in whom it reigns.

1. How apt we are to fall into this vice: And excepting thoſe vices which are immediately founded in a man's natural temper and conſtitution, there is none that men have a more univerſal propenſion to, than this of covetouſneſs. For there are two things which human nature does more eſpecially deſire to be ſecured againſt, which are *want* and *contempt*; and riches ſeem to be a certain remedy againſt both theſe evils. And becauſe men think they can never be ſufficiently ſecured againſt theſe, therefore their deſire of riches grows endleſs and inſatiable; ſo that unleſs men be very jealous and watchful over them-

ſelves, this deſire will grow upon them, and enlarge itſelf beyond all bounds.

2. As men are very apt to fall into this vice, ſo is it of very pernicious conſequence to thoſe in whom it reigns. The miſchief of it is very great, and very extenſive; ſo St. Paul tells us, 1 Tim. vi. 8, 9, 10. where he preſſeth men to be contented with a ſmall competency of the things of this life, becauſe of the great danger and miſchief of a covetous mind; *having food and raiment, let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich* (that is, they that are bent and reſolved upon being rich) *fall into temptation and a ſnare, and into many fooliſh and hurtful luſts, which drown men in deſtruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil.* But this I ſhall ſpeak more fully to, when I come to ſhew the great evil and unreaſonableneſs of this vice.

II. This earneſt kind of caution, as it ſignifies the great danger of this ſin of covetouſneſs, ſo likewiſe the great care that men ought to uſe to preſerve themſelves from it; for the greater the danger is in any kind, ſo much the greater care ſhould be uſed for the avoiding of it. Men are not ſo ſollicitouſly concerned to defend themſelves againſt a ſlight miſchief; but when a terrible one threatens us, we ſhould be continually upon our guard againſt it, and ſummon all our ſtrength and force to reſiſt it. Thus much for the manner of the caution.

I proceed to the *ſecond* thing to be conſidered in the text, *viz.* the matter of the caution, or the vice which our Saviour here warns his hearers againſt, and that is covetouſneſs; *take heed and beware of covetouſneſs.* And in ſpeaking of this, I ſhall conſider theſe two things.

I. Wherein the nature of this vice conſiſts.

II. I ſhall endeavour to ſhew the great evil and unreaſonableneſs of it. I ſhall be large in both.

I. For the nature of this vice of covetouſneſs. The ſhorteſt deſcription that I can give of it is this, that it is *an inordinate deſire and love of riches*; but when this deſire and love are inordinate, is not ſo eaſy to be determined. And therefore, that we may the bet-

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ter underſtand what this ſin of covetouſneſs is, which our Saviour doth ſo earneſtly caution againſt, it will be requiſite to conſider more particularly wherein the vice and fault of it doth conſiſt; that whilſt we are ſpeaking againſt covetouſneſs, we may not under that general word condemn any thing that is commendable or lawful. To the end then that we may the more clearly and diſtinctly underſtand wherein the nature of this vice doth conſiſt, I ſhall,

Firſt, Endeavour to ſhew what is not condemned under this name of covetouſneſs, either in ſcripture, or according to right reaſon: And,

Secondly, What is condemned by either of theſe as a plain inſtance or branch of this ſin.

Firſt, What things are not condemned under the name of covetouſneſs, either in ſcripture, or according to right reaſon, which yet have ſome appearance of it; namely, theſe three things:

1. Not a provident care about the things of this preſent life.

2. Not a regular induſtry and diligence for the obtaining of them: Nor

3. Every degree of love and affection to them. I mention theſe three, becauſe they may all ſeem to be condemned by ſcripture, as parts or degrees of this vice, but really are not.

1. Not a provident care about the things of this preſent life. This indeed ſeems to be condemned in ſcripture as a branch of covetouſneſs, namely, in our Saviour's ſermon upon the mount, Matth. vi. 25. *Take no thought for your life, what ye ſhall eat, or what ye ſhall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye ſhall put on.* Here our Saviour ſeems to forbid all care, even about the neceſſaries of life, meat, and drink, and cloathing; much more about the delights and conveniencies of it. But this is not abſolutely, and in ordinary caſes, intended by our Saviour to be condemned, as I ſhall ſhew by and by under the next head.

2. Neither is a regular induſtry and diligence for the obtaining of theſe things condemned in ſcripture; though this alſo ſeems to be prohibited by

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our Saviour in the ſame chapter, ver. 26. *Behold the fowls of the air: for they ſow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feedeth them*; and ver. 28. *Why take ye thought for raiment? Conſider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they ſpin.* In which words our Saviour ſeems to intimate, that we ought to depend upon the providence of God for food and raiment, and to uſe no more induſtry for the obtaining of them, than the fowls of the air do, or the lilies of the field: And the ſame may ſeem to be collected out of this chapter of St. Luke: for after our Saviour had, in my text, cautioned them againſt covetouſneſs, and ſpoken to them a parable to that purpoſe, of *a rich man who enlarged his barns, and laid up goods for many years*, he infers from thence, ver. 22. that men ſhould take no thought for the things of this life, nor uſe any induſtry about them; *and he ſaid unto his diſciples, therefore I ſay unto you, take no thought for your life, what ye ſhall eat; neither for the body, what ye ſhall put on.*

Now, to avoid all inconvenience from our Saviour's words, I think that it is commonly ſaid by interpreters, that he does here only condemn a diſtruſtful and anxious care about the things of this life, and an over-ſolicitous induſtry and diligence for the obtaining of them; but that he allows a prudent care, and regular induſtry about theſe things: And this were very well ſaid, if it would agree with the ſcope and deſign of our Saviour's diſcourſe; but the inſtances which he gives of the fowls of the air, and the lilies of the field, which are ſufficiently provided for without any care and induſtry of theirs, and which he ſeems to ſet before us for a pattern, *behold* (ſays he) *the fowls of the air:* I ſay, theſe inſtances which he gives, ſeem to exclude even all regular and ordinary care and diligence about theſe things.

What ſhall we ſay then, that our Saviour intended by his religion to take men off from all labour, and induſtry in their callings? This ſeems to be unreaſonable; and indeed ſo it certainly were, if our Saviour had given this for a ſtanding and ordinary rule

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to all Chriſtians; and not only ſo, but contrary to the Apoſtles doctrine, who conſtantly charged Chriſtians to labour with great diligence in their callings, that they might be able to provide for themſelves, and their families.

But this diſcourſe of our Saviour's was not intended for a general and ſtanding rule to all Chriſtians; but only deſigned for his diſciples, to take them off from all care about the things of this life, that they might attend upon his perſon, and wholly give up themſelves to that work to which he had called them. And therefore St. Luke takes notice, that after he had cautioned his hearers in general againſt *covetouſneſs*, he applies himſelf particularly to his diſciples, and tells them, that he would have them ſo far from this vice of *covetouſneſs*, that they ſhould not ſo much as uſe that ordinary care and induſtry about the things of this life, which is not only lawful, but neceſſary for men in all ordinary caſes, ver. 22. *And he ſaid unto his diſciples, therefore I ſay unto you, take no thought for your life, what you ſhall eat.* And this agrees very well with the direction which our Saviour gave to his diſciples, when he firſt ſent them forth to preach, Matth. x. 9. *Provide neither gold nor ſilver, nor braſs in your purſes, neither coat nor ſcrip*; which no man ever underſtood as a general law to all Chriſtians, but as a particular precept to the Apoſtles at that time.

And if this be our Saviour's meaning, there is then no reaſon to think, that this caution againſt *covetouſneſs* does forbid men to uſe a provident care and regular induſtry about the things of this life.

3. Nor is every degree of love and affection to the things of this world condemned in ſcripture, as any branch, or part of this vice of *covetouſneſs*; but ſuch a love of the things of this world as is truly conſiſtent with the love of God, and a due and a ſerious care of our ſouls, is allowed both by ſcripture and reaſon. St. John indeed ſeems to condemn all love of the world, and of the things of it, as utterly inconſiſtent with the love of God, 1 John ii. 15. *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world; if a-*

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ny man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him: But this is, according to the *Hebrew* phraſe and manner of ſpeaking, to forbid things *abſolutely*, which are to be underſtood only *comparatively*. So Matth. vi. 19. *Lay not up for yourſelves treaſures upon earth; but lay up for yourſelves treaſures in heaven; i. e.* be not ſo ſolicitous for the good things of this world, as for the glory and happineſs of the next. And Luke xii. 4. *Be not afraid of them that kill the body*; that is, fear *them* not ſo much as *him that can deſtroy both body and ſoul in hell:* And Luke xiv. 26. *If any man come unto me, and hate not his father and mother, and all that he hath*; that is, if he do not love me more than all theſe things, *he cannot be my diſciple:* And John vi. 27. *Labour not for the meat which periſheth, but for that which endureth to everlaſting life*; that is, labour not ſo much for the one as for the other, be not ſo ſolicitous about the things of this life, as about the great concernments of eternity. So likewiſe Coloſ. iii. 2. *Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth; i. e.* ſet them more on things above, than on earthly things. So here, *Love not the world, neither the things of the world*; that is, do not over-value them, do not love them ſo much as not to be able to part with them for Chriſt; *for if any man* thus *love the world*, he does not love God as he ought. So that when the ſcripture commands us *not to love the world*, this is to be underſtood *comparatively*, that we ſhould not love theſe things in compariſon of God, and the great concernments of another world: But it does not forbid us to love theſe things in a due degree, and with a due ſubordination to thoſe things which are more excellent, and of infinitely greater concernment to us. For nothing can be more inconſiſtent than to recommend to men diligence in their worldly callings and employments (as the ſcripture frequently does) and that in order to the attaining of the good things of this life; and yet to forbid us to love theſe things at all. For if men have no degree of love to them, the beſt argument to diligence for the obtaining of them would be taken away. Beſides, that we

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are commanded in ſcripture to be thankful to God for beſtowing on us the bleſſings of this life, and we are to love him upon this account. Now can any man love the giver, for beſtowing ſuch gifts upon him, which, if he do as he ought, he muſt not love?

You ſee then what thoſe things are, which the ſcripture does not condemn as any branch or degree of this vice of *covetouſneſs*; a provident care, and a regular induſtry, and ſuch a degree of love to the things of this world, as is conſiſtent with the love of God, and the care of our ſouls.

Secondly, I come now to ſhew what is condemned in ſcripture under the name of *covetouſneſs*; and by this we ſhall beſt underſtand wherein the nature of this ſin doth conſiſt. Now *covetouſneſs* is a word of a large ſignification, and comprehends in it moſt of the irregularities of mens minds, either in deſiring, or getting, or in poſſeſſing, and uſing an eſtate. I ſhall ſpeak to each of theſe ſeverally.

I. *Covetouſneſs* in the deſire of riches, conſiſts in an eager and unſatiable deſire after the things of this world. This the ſcripture condemns, though it be free from injuſtice, as it ſeldom happens to be. This inſatiable deſire of wealth, God plainly condemns by his Prophet, Iſa. v. 8. *Wo unto them that join houſe to houſe, and lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midſt of the earth.* And this is that which our Saviour here in the text ſeems to have a more particular reſpect to, when he cautions men againſt the ſin of *covetouſneſs*, as appears both from the reaſon which he gives of this caution, and from the parable whereby he illuſtrates it. From the reaſon which he gives of this caution, *Take heed and beware of covetouſneſs; for the life of man doth not conſiſt in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſeth.* As if he had ſaid, take great care to ſet ſome bounds to your deſires after the things of this world. For whatever men may imagine, it is certain in experience, that it is not the abundance of outward things which makes the life of man happy. Wealth and content do not always dwell together;

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nay ſo far from that, that perhaps they very ſeldom meet.

And the parable likewiſe which follows upon this caution, doth ſufficiently ſhew this to be our Saviour's meaning; for he illuſtrates what he was ſpeaking of, by a rich man whoſe deſire of wealth was never ſatisfied, but he was continually increaſing his eſtate, and enlarging his barns, to make more room ſtill for his fruits, that he might *lay up goods in ſtore for many years.* The parable does not ſo much as intimate any indirect or unjuſt ways of gain, which this man uſed to increaſe his eſtate; but condemns his inſatiable deſire and thirſt after more; ſo that even this alone is *covetouſneſs*, and a great fault, though it were attended with no other; becauſe it is unreaſonable, and without end.

II. There is *covetouſneſs* likewiſe in getting an eſtate; and the vice or evil of this kind of *covetouſneſs* conſiſts chiefly in theſe three things.

1. In the uſe of unlawful and unjuſt ways to get or increaſe an eſtate. He is a covetous man, who by the greedineſs of gain, is tempted to do any unjuſt action, whether it be in the way of fraud and deceit, or of violence and oppreſſion. And this perhaps is that which is moſt frequently in ſcripture called *covetouſneſs*. And this I take to be the meaning of the tenth commandment, *Thou ſhalt not covet*; wherein is forbidden all unjuſt deſire of that which is another man's, and all unjuſt endeavours and attempts to deprive him of it. For ſo our Saviour renders it, *Mark* x. 19. where he ſays to the young man that came to be directed by him, *what good thing he ſhould do, that he might inherit eternal life*; *thou knoweſt the commandments, do not commit adultery, do not kill, do not ſteal, do not bear falſe witneſs*; and then inſtead of the tenth commandment, *thou ſhalt not covet*, or rather by way of explication of it, he adds μὴ ἀποστερήσῃς, *defraud not*; as if he had ſaid in a word, be not injurious to thy neighbour in any kind, in deſiring or endeavouring to deprive him of any thing that is his. As the Romans in their laws were wont to comprehend thoſe crimes which had no pro-

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per name, by the general name of *ſtellionatus*, and *dolus malus*; ſo here in the *decalogue*, after God had inſtanced in the chief and moſt common ſorts of injuries which men are guilty of towards their neighbour, as murder, adultery, theft, bearing of falſe witneſs; he ſums up all the reſt, which could not ſo eaſily be reckoned particularly, in this ſhort and general prohibition, *thou ſhalt not covet*; that is, thou ſhalt not be injurious to thy neighbour in any other kind; *in his wife, or ſervant, or houſe, or cattle, or any thing that is his. Covetouſneſs*, or any inordinate deſire of that which is our neighbour's, being commonly the root and parent of all theſe kind of injuries.

And for the ſame reaſon St. Matthew, inſtead of the tenth commandment, puts this general precept, *Thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thyſelf*, as being the ſenſe of it in other words: Matth. xix. 18, 19. *Thou ſhalt do no murder, thou ſhalt not commit adultery, thou ſhalt not ſteal, thou ſhalt not bear falſe witneſs, honour thy father and thy mother, and thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thyſelf.* And this command of loving our neighbour as ourſelves, our Saviour elſewhere tells us was the ſum of the duties of the ſecond table; and it is the ſame in ſenſe with that precept of our Saviour, Matth. vii. 12. *Therefore all things whatſoever ye would that men ſhould do unto you, do ye even ſo to them.* That is, as thou wouldeſt have no man to be injurious to thee in any thing, ſo be not thou to any other man in any kind. And the Apoſtle, Rom. xiii. 8, 9, 10. ſhews us upon what account this general precept, *Thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thyſelf*, is the ſum of the ſecond table. *He that loveth another hath fulfilled the law: for this, thou ſhalt not commit adultery, thou ſhalt not kill, thou ſhalt not ſteal, thou ſhalt not bear falſe witneſs, thou ſhalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this ſaying, namely, thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thyſelf.* And then he adds in the next words, *Love worketh no ill to his neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.* That is, he that truly loves his

neighbour, will not be injurious to him in any kind: Therefore love is the ſum of the law.

The deſign of all this is to ſhew, that he that is injurious to his neighbour in his eſtate in any kind, is properly guilty of the ſin of *covetouſneſs*, which is forbidden in the tenth commandment. So that all arts of fraud and oppreſſion whereby men endeavour to get and increaſe an eſtate by the injury of their neighbour, is a branch of the ſin of *covetouſneſs*.

2. The vice of *covetouſneſs* in getting wealth, does likewiſe conſiſt in an anxious and tormenting care about obtaining the things of this life. The regular and due temper of a man's mind about the things of this world, is to commit ourſelves to the providence of God in the uſe of honeſt and lawful endeavours, and to refer the ſucceſs of all to his good pleaſure; and whatſoever is beyond this, is a branch from the evil root of *covetouſneſs*. We diſtruſt the providence of God, when, after we have uſed our beſt endeavours, and begged his bleſſing upon them, we torment ourſelves about the iſſue and event of things. And as this is ſinful, ſo it is vain, and to no purpoſe. Diligence in our buſineſs is the way to get an eſtate; but no man was ever the richer for tormenting himſelf becauſe he was not ſo. The reaſon why men ſeek the things of this world, and take pains to get them, is to make life convenient and comfortable; and conſequently he that torments himſelf about the getting of theſe things, contradicts himſelf in his own deſign, becauſe he makes his life miſerable, that he may make it comfortable.

3. The ſin of *covetouſneſs* in getting, conſiſts in ſeeking the things of this life, with the neglect of things infinitely better, and which are of far greater and nearer concernment to us. He is a covetous man, who ſo minds the world, as to neglect God, and his ſoul; who is ſo buſy and intent upon making proviſion for this life, as to take no care of the other; ſo concerned for a few days of his pilgrimage here, as to have no conſideration and regard for his eternal abode in another world. God allows us to pro-

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vide for this life, and conſiders the neceſſities which do continually preſs us while we are in the body: But while we are making proviſion for theſe dying bodies, he expects that we ſhould remember that we have immortal ſouls; which, ſince they are to have an endleſs duration in another world, ought to be provided for with far greater care. It is an inordinate deſire of riches, when men ſo lay out all their care and induſtry for the obtaining of them, as if nothing elſe were to be regarded, as if no conſideration at all were to be had of another world, and of that better part of ourſelves which is to continue and live for ever. All deſires and endeavours after riches, which take men off from the buſineſs of religion, and the care of their ſouls, which allow men neither the leiſure and opportunity, nor the heart and affection to love God, and to ſerve him, are to be referred to this ſin of *covetouſneſs*, which is here condemned by our Saviour in the text.

III. There is *covetouſneſs* likewiſe in poſſeſſing or uſing an eſtate: And this conſiſts chiefly in theſe three things:

Firſt, When men are ſordid towards themſelves, and cannot find in their hearts to uſe and enjoy what they poſſeſs; are continually adding to their eſtate, without any deſign of enjoyment; and take infinite pains to raiſe a huge fortune, not that they may uſe it, but that they may be ſaid to have it. This is a degree of covetouſneſs even beyond that of the rich man in the parable after the text: For he, it ſeems, after he had enlarged his barns to his mind, and *laid up goods for many years*, deſigned at laſt to have taken his eaſe, and have fallen to the enjoyment of what he had gotten; to have eat and drank, and to have been merry; and this, though it proved but a fooliſh deſign in the iſſue, he being cut off in that very inſtant, when he was come to the point of ſatisfaction and enjoyment; yet is it infinitely more reaſonable, than to take great pains to get an eſtate with a full reſolution never to be the better for it.

Secondly, Men are covetous in keeping an eſtate, when they do not uſe it charitably; when they can-

not find in their hearts to ſpare any thing out of their abundance, to the relief of thoſe who are in want. Though a man get an eſtate without *covetouſneſs*, and have an heart to enjoy it, yet ſo far he is covetous, as he is uncharitable. He loves money more than he ought, who having enough to ſpare, chooſeth rather to keep it, than to do good with it, and to uſe it to one of the principal ends for which God gives an eſtate.

Thirdly, They likewiſe are covetous, who place their chief truſt and happineſs in riches, who (as the expreſſion is, *Job* xxxi. 24.) *make gold their hope, and ſay to the fine gold, thou art my confidence.* And this is the reaſon, why *covetouſneſs* is ſo often in ſcripture called *idolatry*; becauſe the covetous man ſets up his riches in the place of God, putting his truſt and confidence in them, and ſetting his whole heart upon them, loving them as he ſhould love God only, with all his heart, and ſoul, and ſtrength: And therefore mammon, which ſignifies riches, is in ſcripture repreſented as a deity, and the covetous man as a ſervant, or worſhipper of mammon.

So that in ſcripture he is a covetous man who placeth his chief felicity in a great fortune, and will venture to loſe any thing rather than to part with that; who will quit his religion, and violate his conſcience, and run the hazard of his ſoul, rather than forfeit his eſtate, or the hopes of advancing it to his mind.

And this in times of trial and difficulty, is the great temptation to which the covetous man is expoſed. When a man may not only ſave himſelf, but get conſiderable advantage by departing from the truth; and in changing his religion, may have a good ſum of money to boot, or which is equal to it, a good place; this to a covetous mind is a very ſtrong temptation, and almoſt irreſiſtible. When error and deluſion can bid ſo high, and offer ſo good terms, no wonder if it gain ſome proſelytes among the covetous and ambitious part of mankind. This the Apoſtle gives warning of, as a great temptation to rich men in times of ſuffering, 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10. *They that will be*

be rich, fall into temptation, and a ſnare: for the love of money is the root of all evil; which while ſome have luſted after, they have erred from the faith. The young man in the goſpel is a ſad inſtance of this kind, who choſe rather to leave Chriſt, than to part with his great poſſeſſions. And ſuch a one was Demas, who forſook the Apoſtles, and Chriſtianity itſelf, to cleave to this preſent world.

Thus I have done with the firſt thing I propoſed to ſpeak to, the nature of this vice, which our Saviour in the text cautions men ſo earneſtly againſt; *take heed and beware of covetouſneſs.* I ſhall now proceed, in the ſecond place, to ſhew the evil and unreaſonableneſs of this vice: But that ſhall be the ſubject of another diſcourſe.

SERMON XCI.

The evil and unreaſonableneſs of covetouſneſs.

LUKE xii. 15.

And he ſaid unto them, Take heed and beware of covetouſneſs; for a man's life conſiſteth not in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſeth.

The ſecond ſermon on this text.

I Have made entrance into a diſcourſe upon theſe words, in which I have told you there are three things obſervable.

Firſt, The manner of the caution, which our Saviour here gives, *take heed and beware.*

Secondly, The matter of the caution, or the ſin which our Saviour here warns his hearers againſt, *take heed and beware of covetouſneſs:* And

Thirdly, The reaſon of this caution, becauſe *a man's life conſiſteth not in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſeth.*

In diſcourſing of the ſecond of theſe, *viz.* the matter of the caution, I propoſed,

1. To conſider wherein the nature of this vice of covetouſneſs does conſiſt.

2. To ſhew the evil and unreaſonableneſs of it.

The firſt of theſe I have diſpatched, and now go on to the ſecond, *viz.* To ſhew the great evil, and unreaſonableneſs of the vice of covetouſneſs.

Now covetouſneſs will appear to be very evil, and unreaſonable, upon theſe following accounts:

I. Becauſe it takes men off from religion, and the care of their ſouls.

II. Becauſe it tempts men to do many things which are inconſiſtent with religion, and directly contrary to it.

III. Becauſe it is an endleſs and inſatiable deſire.

IV. Becauſe the happineſs of human life doth not conſiſt in riches.

V. Becauſe riches do very often contribute very much to the miſery and infelicity of men.

Firſt, Covetouſneſs takes men off from religion, and the care of their ſouls. The covetous man is wholly intent upon this world; and his inordinate deſire after theſe things, makes him to neglect God, and the eternal concernments of his ſoul. He employs all his time, and care, and thoughts about theſe temporal things, and his vehement love and eager purſuit of theſe things ſteals away his heart from God, robs him of his time, and of all opportunities for his ſoul, and diverts him from all ſerious thoughts of another world, and the life to come. And the reaſon of this is that which our Saviour gives, Matth. vi. 24. *No man can ſerve two maſters; for either he will hate the one and love the other; or elſe he will hold to the one, and deſpiſe the other. Ye cannot ſerve God and mammon.* No man can ſerve two maſters ſo different as God and the world are; becauſe they will give croſs commands, and enjoin contrary things. God calls upon us to mind the duties of his worſhip and ſervice, to have a ſerious regard to religion, and a diligent care of our ſouls: But the cares of the world, and the importunity of buſineſs, and an eager appetite

appetite of being rich, call us off from theſe divine and ſpiritual employments, or diſturb us in them. God calls upon us to be charitable to thoſe that are in want, to be willing to diſtribute, and ready to communicate to the neceſſities of our brethren; but our covetouſneſs pulls us back, and hales us another way, and checks all merciful and charitable inclinations in us. God calls us to ſelf-denial, and ſuffering for the ſake of him, and his truth, and commands us to prefer the keeping of faith and a good conſcience, to all worldly conſiderations whatſoever: But the world inſpires us with other thoughts, and whiſpers to us *to ſave ourſelves, not to be righteous over much*, and rather to truſt God with our ſouls, than men with our bodies and eſtates.

If we ſet our hearts and affections ſtrongly upon any thing, they will partake of the object which they are converſant about; for *where our treaſure is*, (as our Lord hath told us) *there will our hearts be alſo*. If a great eſtate be our chief end and deſign, if riches be our treaſure, and our happineſs, our hearts will be found *among the ſtuff*. We cannot beſtow our affections freely upon two objects. We cannot intenſely love God, and the world; for no man can have two ultimate ends, two principal deſigns. Our *riches may increaſe*, but if we *ſet our hearts upon them*, and give them the chief place in our affections, we make them our Lord and Maſter. Whatever we make our ultimate end, we give it a ſovereignty and empire over us; we put ourſelves under its dominion, and make ourſelves ſubject to all its commands. So that if *it bid us go we muſt go; come, we muſt come; do this, we muſt do it; becauſe we are under authority*: The world is our maſter, and we are its ſlaves. Now he that is under the rule and dominion of this maſter, muſt withdraw his obedience from God, and in many caſes decline obedience to his laws.

This worldly covetous diſpoſition was that which made thoſe in the parable to make ſo many excuſes, when they were invited to the ſupper, Luke xiv. 18. *One had bought a farm, and he could not come; another had bought ſo many yoke of oxen, and there-*

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fore he desired to be excused. Riches do so fill the covetous man's heart, and the cares of the world so possess his mind, that he hath no room left in his soul for any other guests: *Intus existens prohibet alienum, that which is full already can receive no more.* The covetous man's heart is taken up with such things as keep out God, and Christ, and better things. *If any man love the world, and the things of it,* to this degree, St. John tells us, that *the love of the Father is not in him.* In the parable of the sower, Matth. xiii. 7. our Saviour represents to us, *the cares of the world, which choak the word of God,* by *thorns which sprung up among the seed, and stifled the growth of it.* The cares of the world will not suffer the word of God to take deep root in our hearts, and to have any permanent effect upon them: And Ezek. xxxiii. 31. God gives this as a reason why the people of Israel would not hearken to the words of his prophet, because their hearts were upon the world: *They come unto thee* (says God there to the prophet) *as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness.* A heart that is deeply engaged in the world, will stand out against all the invitations, and promises, and threatnings of God's word. When the word of God invites such persons, it is like making love to those who have already fixed their hearts and affections elsewhere; the promises and threatnings of the gospel signify but very little to such men, because their hearts are set upon worldly things, and all their affections are bent that way; all their hopes and desires are worldly; to be rich and abound in wealth; and all their fears are of poverty and loss. Now such a man can only be moved with the promises and threatnings of temporal things; for no promises have any effect upon us, but such as are of some good, which we care for and value: Nor are any threatnings apt to move us, but such as are of some evil which we dread, and are afraid of. And therefore when eternal life, and the happiness of another world, are offered to a worldly-minded

minded man, he does not desire it, he is not at all sensible of the value of it; the man's heart is full already of other hopes and desires, and *the full soul loatheth the honey-comb.* Promise to such a man the kingdom of heaven, and the pleasures of God's presence, and the joys of eternity, this does not signify to such a man any good or happiness that he is sensible of, or knows how to relish. And on the other hand, threaten him with the loss of God, and eternal separation from that fountain of happiness, and with the unspeakable anguish and torments of a long eternity; these things, though they be terrible, yet they are at a distance, and the covetous man is inured to sense, and is only to be moved with things present and sensible; he cannot extend his fears so far as another world, so long as he finds himself well and at ease, as to the things of this present life.

If we would affect such a man, we must offer to his consideration something that is fit to work upon him: threaten him with breaking open his house, and rifling his coffers, and carrying away his full bags; with questioning his title to his estate, or starting a precedent mortgage, or something of the like nature: these things indeed are dreadful and terrible to him; now you speak intelligibly to him, and he understands what you mean. Tell him of a good bargain, or an advantageous purchase, offer him decently a good bribe, or give him notice of a young heir that may be circumvented, and drawn in, then you say something to him that is worthy of his regard and attention; the man may be tempted by such offers and promises as these: But discourse to him *with the tongue of men and Angels*, of the excellency of virtue and goodness, and of the necessity of it, to the obtaining of a glory and happiness that shall neither have bounds nor end; and *lo! thou art unto him as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well upon an instrument; for he hears thy words, but he will not do them*, as the prophet expresseth it, Ezek. xxxiii. 32. Such discourses as these they look upon as fine talk, or a melodious sound, that vanisheth into air, but leaves no impression

sion behind it. Perhaps even these dull and stupid kind of men are affected a little for the present with the liveliness of the romance, and the poetical vein of the preacher; but these things *pass away like a tale that is told*, but have no lasting effect upon them. So effectually doth covetousness, and *the love of this present world*, obstruct all those passages, through which the consideration of religion and heavenly things should enter into our minds.

Secondly, As covetousness hinders men from religion, and takes them off from a due care of their souls; so it many times tempts and engageth men to do many things contrary to religion, and inconsistent with it: It is the natural source and fountain of a great many evils, and the parent of most of the worst of vices. He that will engage deep in the world, must use much more guard and caution than most men do, to do it without sin. How many temptations is the covetous man exposed to in the getting, and in the securing, and in the spending and enjoying of a great estate? It is no easy task to reckon them up, and much more difficult to escape or resist them, and yet each of these temptations brings him into the danger of a great many sins. For,

I. In the getting of an estate, he is exposed to all those vices which may seem to be serviceable to this design. Nothing hath been the cause of more and greater sins in the world than covetousness, and *making haste to be rich*. It is Solomon's observation, Prov. xxviii. 20. *He that maketh haste to be rich, shall not be innocent.* He does not say he *cannot* be innocent, but he speaks as if there were all the probability in the world that he will not prove to be so; but being in so much haste, will almost unavoidably fall into a great many oversights and faults. And the heathen Poet makes the same observation in more words:

Inde ferè scelerum causæ: nec plura venena
Miscuit, aut ferro grassatur sæpius ullum
Humanæ mentis vitium, quàm sæva cupido
Immodici census; nam divos qui fuit vult,

Et

Et citò vult fieri. Sed quæ reverentia legum,
Quis metus aut pudor est unquam properantis avari?

"This, says he, is the cause of most sins: nor is "there any vice of which the mind of man is ca- "pable, that hath been guilty of more murders and "poisonings, than a furious desire of immoderate "wealth; for he that *will be rich* will *make haste* "to be so: And what reverence of laws, what fear "or shame, was ever seen in any man that was in "haste to be rich?" And this is the sense of what the Apostle says concerning this vice of covetousness, this peremptory resolution of being rich, 1 Tim. vi. 9. 10. *They that will be rich fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil.* If this vice of covetousness once reign in us, if we have once fixed our end, and set up this resolution with ourselves that *we will be rich*, we shall then make every thing stoop and submit to this design. A covetous man will make his principles and his conscience to bend to his resolution of being rich, and to bow to that interest. The eager desire of riches makes men to pursue them in indirect and uncharitable ways, by falshood and perjury, by undermining and over-reaching, by dissembling and flattery, by corrupting and imbasing of commodities, by false weights and measures, by taking fees with both hands, by making use of their power and wit to oppress and defraud their brother, by imposing upon his ignorance and simplicity, or by making a prey of his poverty and necessity.

Covetousness many times makes men cruel and unjust; nay it makes them guilty of the worst sort of cruelty and oppression. For (as one says well) the covetous man oppresseth his neighbour, not for any good to himself; for he does not enjoy what he tears and rends from others; so that he is of that most hateful kind of beasts of prey, that kill other creatures, not to eat them, but that they may see them ly dead by them. Lions and wolves kill out of hunger; but the covetous man, like a serpent or scorpion, stings

ſtings and bites others to death, not for his need, but for his pleaſure and recreation. Covetouſneſs is the parent of the moſt monſtrous ſins; becauſe it fixeth a man in a reſolution of getting an eſtate by any means. If falſeneſs and deceit, violence and oppreſſion, will further this end; the earneſt deſire of the end tempts men to uſe any ſort of means whereby the end may be compaſſed; and though a man may have ſome averſeneſs from them at firſt, yet that wears off by degrees, and the ſtrong deſire of the end reconciles a man at laſt to the love and liking of the means, how wicked and unwarrantable ſoever. Covetouſneſs tempted Achan to ſteal the accurſed thing, and Gehazi to lie to the prophet, and Ahab to oppreſs and murder Naboth. Nay, a ſmall ſum tempted the covetous mind of Judas to betray his maſter and his Saviour. And how do many men every day ſtrain their conſciences to get an eſtate, and hazard their ſouls for money; nay exchange their ſouls, which are of more value than the whole world, for a very ſmall portion of it!

II. There are likewiſe many other temptations which a covetous man is expoſed to in the keeping and ſecuring of an eſtate when he hath got it. A covetous and worldly minded man, when it comes to the trial, is in great danger of quitting his religion, and *making ſhipwrack of faith and a good conſcience.* When his eſtate comes to be in hazard, he is very apt to fall off from the truth; it is an hundred to one but in theſe circumſtances, he will chooſe rather to violate his conſcience, than to forfeit his eſtate. What the Devil falſely ſaid of Job, is true of the covetous man, *he does not ſerve God for nought.* Upon theſe terms it was that Chriſt and the young man parted; he *had great poſſeſſions,* and it troubled him to part with them. When Demas was brought to the trial, and put to it, whether he would ſtick to the profeſſion of the goſpel, or his worldly poſſeſſions, he quitted St. Paul, and declared for the world, 2 Tim. iv. 10. *Demas hath forſaken me, having loved this preſent world.* So far had his covetous humour beſotted him, as to make him prefer his preſent intereſt in theſe tem-

temporal things, before thoſe eternal rewards which the goſpel offered.

III. There are likewiſe many temptations which men are expoſed to in the enjoying and ſpending of a great eſtate. It is hard to have a great eſtate, and not to be maſtered by the love of it; nor to have our cares and thoughts, our hearts and affections ſwallowed up by it. It is no eaſy thing for a man that hath riches, not to overvalue them, and love them more than he ought; not to be puffed up by them, and ſo place his truſt and confidence in them, Prov. xviii. 11. *The rich man's wealth is his ſtrong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit.* The covetous man ſetteth up his riches in the place of God, and is apt *to fall down before this golden calf, and worſhip it: To ſay to the gold, thou art my hope, and to the fine gold, thou art my confidence: To rejoice, becauſe his wealth is great, and becauſe his hand hath gotten much.*

Riches are a great temptation to irreligion and atheiſm. Upon this account Agur wiſely prays to God for a moderate eſtate, becauſe of the danger of both the extremes of riches and poverty; becauſe of the great and violent temptations which men are expoſed to in both theſe conditions, Prov. xxxviii. 9. *Give me neither poverty nor riches, but feed me with food convenient for me.* Why not riches? *Leſt I be full and deny thee, and ſay, who is the Lord?* And much more do riches tempt men to pride and inſolence towards others, Prov. xviii. 23. *The poor uſeth entreaties, but the rich anſwereth roughly.* Mens ſpirits are commonly blown up and bloated with their fortunes, and their pride, and ſtomach, and paſſion, do uſually increaſe in proportion to their wealth.

And many times riches tempt men to luxury and intemperance, and all manner of exceſs. Rich men have a mighty temptation to allow themſelves all manner of unlawful pleaſure; becauſe he who hath a great eſtate is furniſhed with that to which hardly any thing can be denied. And this is not inconſiſtent with a covetous humour; for there are, many times, men who are covetous in getting, for no other end

and reaſon, but that they may *ſpend it upon their luſts.* As covetouſneſs ſometimes ſtarves other vices, ſo ſometimes it ſerves them, and is made ſubordinate to a man's ambition, or luſt, or ſome other reigning vice. There is no ſuch abſolute inconſiſtency between riches and virtue, but that it is poſſible that a man that is very rich may be very good. But yet if we conſult experience, I doubt it will be found a true obſervation, that there are but very few rich men, who are not inſupportable, either for their vanity or their vices; ſo that our Saviour had reaſon for that ſevere queſtion, *How hard is it for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God?* And well might he upon this account pronounce the *poor* (the poor in eſtate, as well as the poor in ſpirit) *bleſſed*, as we find he does, Luke vi. 20. *Bleſſed be ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.* They oftener enter there than the rich.

Thirdly, Covetouſneſs is likewiſe evil and unreaſonable, becauſe it is an endleſs and inſatiable deſire. A covetous mind may propoſe to itſelf ſome certain bounds and limits, and a man may think that when he is arrived to ſuch an eſtate, and hath raiſed his fortune to ſuch a pitch, that he will then ſit down contented and ſatisfied, and will ſeek after no more. But he deceives himſelf in this matter; for when he hath attained to that which he propoſed to himſelf, he will be never the nearer being ſatisfied. So Solomon tells us, Eccleſ. v. 10. *He that loveth ſilver, ſhall not be ſatisfied with ſilver; nor he that loveth abundance, with increaſe*; for no degree of wealth can ſatisfy a covetous mind. He may think ſo beforehand, that if he had ſo much it would be enough; but when he hath attained it, he will be ſtill reaching after more; for covetouſneſs is a diſeaſe of the mind, and an unnatural thirſt, which is inflamed by that which ſhould quench it. Every deſire that is natural, is ſatisfied and at reſt, when it hath once obtained the thing it deſired. If a man be hungry, he is ſatisfied when he hath eaten; or if he be thirſty, the thirſt is allayed and quenched when he hath drank to ſuch a proportion as nature doth require; and if he eat and drink beyond this meaſure, nature is oppreſt,

and

and it is a burden to him. But covetouſneſs is not the thirſt of nature, but of a diſeaſed mind. It is the thirſt of a fever, or of a dropſy; the more a man drinks, the more he deſires, and the more he is inflamed. In like manner, the more the covetous man increaſeth his eſtate, the more his deſires are enlarged and extended, and he finds continually new occaſions and new neceſſities; and every day as he grows richer, he diſcovers new wants; and a new poverty to be provided againſt, which he did not think of before, comes into his mind: *Et minùs hæc optat, qui non habet; and he that is without theſe things, covets them leſs than he that hath them.* So far is a covetous man's attaining to riches from giving him ſatisfaction, that he who hath ſcarce any thing at all, is many times much nearer to contentment, than he that hath got ſo much; nay, ſo unreaſonable is this appetite, as to deſire more, even when the man knows not how to beſtow what he hath already. This Solomon obſerved long ſince (for the vices and humours of men are much the ſame in all ages) Eccleſ. iv. 8. *There is one alone, and there is not a ſecond; yea, he hath neither child nor brother; yet there is no end of all his labour, neither is his eye ſatisfied with riches, neither ſaith he, For whom do I labour, and bereave my ſoul of good? This is alſo vanity, yea, it is a ſore travel.* And indeed what can be greater vanity and folly, than to be at certain pains and labour all the days of a man's life, and yet to be uncertain all the while, for whom it is that he drudgeth and taketh all theſe pains.

And if this be the nature of this vice, the more it gets, ſtill to covet the more; then nothing can be more unreaſonable, than to think to gratify this appetite; becauſe at this rate, the man can never be contented, becauſe he can never have enough; nay, ſo far is it from that, that every new acceſſion to his fortune, ſets his deſires one degree farther from reſt and ſatisfaction: for a covetous mind having no bounds, it is very probable that the man's deſire will increaſe much faſter than his eſtate; and then the richer he is, he is ſtill the poorer, becauſe he is ſtill

the leſs contented with his condition. However, it is impoſſible that the man's deſire ſhould ever be ſatisfied; for deſire being always firſt, if the man's deſire of riches advanceth and goes forward as faſt as riches follow, then it is not poſſible for riches ever to overtake the deſire of them, no more than the hinder wheels of a coach can overtake thoſe which are before; becauſe as they were at a diſtance at firſt ſetting out, ſo let them go never ſo far, or ſo faſt, they keep the ſame diſtance ſtill.

So that it is the vaineſt thing in the world, for a man to deſign his own ſatisfaction by the perpetual increaſe of his fortune, becauſe contentment doth not ariſe from the abundance of what a man hath, but it muſt ſpring from the inward frame and temper of our minds; and the true way to it, is not to enlarge our eſtate, but to contract our deſires; and then it is poſſible that a man's money and his mind may meet; otherwiſe the purſuit is endleſs, and the farther a man follows contentment, it will but flee ſo much the farther from him; and when he hath attained the eſtate of a Prince, and a revenue as great as that of France, or the Turkiſh empire, he ſhall be farther from being ſatisfied, than when he began the world, and had no more before-hand than would juſt pay for his next meal.

I ſhould now have proceeded to the fourth thing, whereby the unreaſonableneſs of covetouſneſs doth appear; becauſe the happineſs of human life doth not conſiſt in riches. And this is the argument which I ſhall more eſpecially inſiſt upon, becauſe it is that which our Saviour uſeth here in the text, to take men off from this vice. *The life of a man conſiſteth not in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſeth.* And this certainly is one of the beſt and moſt reaſonable conſiderations in the world, to moderate mens affections towards theſe things. Every reaſonable deſire propounds ſome end to itſelf. Now to what purpoſe ſhould any man deſire to increaſe his wealth ſo vaſtly beyond the proportion of his neceſſities and real occaſions? What benefit and advantage would it be to any man, to have an hundred

times

times more than he knows what to do withal? But I ſhall not enlarge upon this argument at preſent, but refer it to another opportunity.

SERMON XCII.

The evil and unreaſonableneſs of covetouſneſs.

LUKE xii. 15.

And he ſaid unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetouſneſs; for a man's life conſiſteth not in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſeth.

The third ſermon on this text.

AFTER I had in my firſt diſcourſe upon this ſubject, given you an account of the nature of the vice of covetouſneſs, I proceeded in the next place to repreſent the great evil and unreaſonableneſs of it.

Firſt, Becauſe it takes men off from religion, and the care of their ſouls.

Secondly, Becauſe it tempts men to many things which are inconſiſtent with religion, and directly contrary to it.

Thirdly, Becauſe it is an endleſs and inſatiable deſire. Thus far I have gone; I proceed to the

Fourth thing, whereby the unreaſonableneſs of covetouſneſs will yet farther appear; namely, becauſe the happineſs of human life doth not conſiſt in riches and abundance. And this I ſhall inſiſt upon ſomewhat the more largely, becauſe it is the argument which our Saviour makes uſe of here in the text, to take men off from this ſin. *The life of man conſiſteth not in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſeth, Therefore take heed and beware of covetouſneſs.* And this certainly is one of the beſt and moſt reaſonable conſiderations in the world, to mo-

derate our affections towards theſe things. For every reaſonable deſire propounds ſome end to itſelf. Now to what purpoſe ſhould any man deſire to increaſe his wealth ſo vaſtly, and beyond the proportion of his neceſſities and real occaſions? What benefit and advantage can it be to any man, to have an hundred, or perhaps a thouſand times more than he knows what to do withal?

And as for the other world, no man ever pretended that the heaping up riches here, would be uſeful to him there; *riches will not deliver him in the day of wrath.* No man was ever ſo ſenſeleſs, as to imagine that he could take his eſtate along with him into the other world; or if he could, that heaven was to be bought with money; or that a great eſtate, or a great many lordſhips would recommend him to the favour of God. 'Tis true indeed, a man may ſo uſe riches in this world, as thereby to promote and further his happineſs in the next. But then it is likewiſe as true, that a man may ſo demean himſelf in a poor and low condition, as thereby to render himſelf as acceptable to God, and capable of as great a reward as the richeſt man can do. The poor woman's two mites chearfully given to pious and charitable uſes, will go as far in the other world, and find as great a reward there, as the rich man's thouſands of gold and ſilver. And a man may be as truly generous and charitable out of a little, as out of the greateſt fortune. Beſides, that the poor man's contentedneſs in a mean condition, is more admirable in itſelf, and more valuable with God, than for a rich man to be ſo.

So that the great uſe of riches reſpects this world, and the beſt uſe of them is in ways of charity; and the poor man's charity, though it cannot be of ſo great an extent in the effects of it, yet in the degree of its virtue and merit, it may be equal to it.

Now the two great deſigns of men, in regard to this world, are theſe:

1. To maintain and ſupport our lives as long as we can.

2. To

2. To make our lives as truly happy and comfortable as we can.

To the firſt of theſe ends, namely, the ſupport of our lives, a very little will ſuffice; and 'tis not much that is neceſſary to the other, to render our lives as truly comfortable as this world can make them; ſo that a vaſt eſtate is not neceſſary to either of theſe ends; for a man may live by having what is neceſſary, and may live comfortably, by having that which is convenient.

No man lives the longer by having abundance; it is many times an occaſion of ſhorning a man's life, by miniſtring to exceſs and intemperance; but ſeldom of prolonging it. And ſetting aſide the vain fancy and conceit of men, no man lives the more happily, for having more than he hath real uſe and occaſion for.

Theſe two heads, I ſhall at preſent ſpeak to, to make out the full force of this reaſon, which our Saviour here uſeth, namely; *that a man's life conſiſteth not in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſeth.*

I. That riches do not contribute to the ſupport of our lives; nor

II. To the happineſs and comfort of them. That is, they are not neceſſary to either of theſe ends. For by riches I mean, whatever is beyond a ſufficient competency of thoſe things which are requiſite to the real uſes and occaſions of human life.

Firſt, Riches and abundance do not contribute to the ſupport of our lives. And this our Saviour very well repreſents to us in the parable immediately after the text, of the rich man, who was continually increaſing his eſtate, ſo that he *had goods laid up for many years*; but he lived not one jot the longer for being provided of the conveniencies of life for ſo long a time before-hand; for whilſt he was bleſſing himſelf, as if he had ſecured his happineſs ſufficiently for this world, he was uncertain of his continuance in it; God having decreed to take him out of this world, at that very time when he had determined to enter upon the enjoyment of thoſe things which he had

had been so long laying up. God says to him, *Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee; and then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?* that is, what good then will all these things do thee, when thou hast no further use of, and occasion for them? So that if he had been the poorest man in the world, and had not been provided for the next meal, he might have have lived as long as he did with all his stores. You see then that in this sense, *a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.* For notwithstanding all his great barns, and the abundance of fruits he had stowed in them, he did not live one jot the longer than the poorest man might have done.

Secondly, Nor do riches contribute to the happiness and comfort of our lives. Happiness is not to be bought and purchased together with great lordships; it depends upon a great many causes, among which a competency of the things of this world is one; but riches and abundance is none of them. The happiness of this world consists in these two things:

1. In the enjoyment of good. And,
2. In a state of freedom from evil.

Now riches do not necessarily make a man happy in either of these respects.

First, For the enjoyment of good, a competent estate suitable to the condition and station in which God hath set us in this world, will give a man whatever nature and reason can desire; and abundance cannot make a man happier. If a man had an hundred times more than he needed, he could but enjoy it according to the capacity of a man; for if he consulted his own happiness, and would truly enjoy what he hath, he must eat and drink within the bounds of temperance and health; and must wear no more cloaths than are for his convenience. 'Tis true, he hath wherewithal to put on a new suit every day; which is to be uneasy all the days of his life; and may drink, if he pleases, every time out of a new cup; which would be a vain expence, and a great trouble

trouble to his ſervants, without any manner of convenience to himſelf.

But then if riches fall into the covetous man's hands, they can be no happineſs to him, becauſe he hath no heart to enjoy them. He hath indeed the eſtate of a rich man, but he wants the comfort of it, becauſe he hath the mind of a poor man; and enjoyment is all the felicity that is in a great fortune; what we enjoy is ours, but what we lay up, is from that time not ours, but ſomebody's elſe. He that heaps up riches, and enjoys them not, is rich only for his heir, but a beggar for himſelf.

We are apt to pity poor men, and too apt to deſpiſe them; but ſurely no man's condition is more to be deplored than his; who ſtarves himſelf in the midſt of plenty, and being ſurrounded with the bleſſings of God, turns them into the greateſt curſe; for it is a much greater curſe, not to uſe an eſtate when one has it, than not to have it. It is like a plentiful table without an appetite.

But it may be it is a great happineſs to have a great eſtate, though a man never uſe it: The pleaſure of ſeeing it, and telling it over, may be like the removing of billets; which may warm a man as much as if he had ſpent and conſumed them. But this is real, and the other only imaginary. I doubt not, many covetous men take a great deal of pleaſure in ruminating upon their wealth, and in recounting what they have; but they have a great deal of tormenting care and fear about it; and if they had not, it is very hard to underſtand where the reaſonable pleaſure and happineſs lies of having things to no end. It is at the beſt, like that of ſome fooliſh birds, which, they ſay, take pleaſure in ſtealing money, that they may hide it; as if it were worth the while for men to take pains to dig ſilver out of the earth, for no other purpoſe, but to melt it down and ſtamp it, and bury it there again.

But many neceſſities may happen, which we cannot foreſee, and it is good to provide againſt them. There is nothing ſo bad, but ſomething may be ſaid in excuſe of it; and I do not deny, but that a provident

vident care againſt the common accidents of human life is very commendable; but it is unreaſonable to think of providing againſt all poſſibilities, which it is impoſſible either to foreſee or prevent. It is very poſſible, that after a man hath gotten the greateſt eſtate imaginable, he may loſe it all by ſome fatal accident; and then to what purpoſe was all this proviſion made, when that which was ſo long a time a getting and laying up, is loſt at once?

Beſides, that it is not eaſy to conceive what neceſſity can happen to a covetous man, to give him an occaſion of uſing his eſtate. He cannot find in his heart to beſtow it upon himſelf in ſuch things as are convenient, nay, almoſt neceſſary for the ſupport of his life; for no man can feed his ſervants more penuriouſly than he does himſelf. All the religion he values himſelf upon, is a ſtrict obſervance of the Leſſian diet, which he recommends to thoſe few that can deny themſelves to dine with him, in hopes to make better meals upon his eſtate when he is gone. And if he be ſo penurious to himſelf, the neceſſities of others are not like to move him to be liberal. I can but imagine one occaſion that could tempt ſuch a man to lay out what he hath; namely, when one part of his eſtate is in danger, to ſpend the other to ſecure it. And yet even in that caſe, if his cauſe were not very clear and good, he would go nigh to loſe it, by uſing it as he does himſelf; that is, by ſtarving it. And if this be all, then a man has as good be without an eſtate, and ſave himſelf the trouble either of getting it, or ſecuring it; for if it were all gone, he might live as well as he does, and that with half the care and pains.

Secondly, The happineſs of this world conſiſts in a ſtate of freedom from evil. Now the great evils that men are liable to in this world, are ſuch as are incident to them, either in the courſe of their lives, or at the time of their death; and riches do not contribute to mens happineſs, by freeing them from either of theſe. I ſhall ſpeak to theſe ſeverally.

I. Not from the evils which are incident to men in

in the courſe of their lives. Theſe are of two kinds, inward and outward.

1. Inward evils, by which I mean thoſe of the mind; and our greateſt troubles are from within, from the anxiety of our minds, and the guilt of our conſciences, from the vicious inclinations of our wills, and the irregularity and diſorders of our paſſions. Now riches were an admirable thing indeed, and worth our coveting, if they would help to cure theſe diſtempers of our minds; but they are the leaſt fitted for ſuch a purpoſe of any thing in the world; for not he that hath the greateſt eſtate, but he that hath the feweſt and moſt reaſonable deſires, and the beſt governed paſſions, and the moſt virtuous inclinations, is the happieſt man, and dwells neareſt to ſatisfaction: *Nemo malus felix, no bad man can be happy*, though he were poſſeſſed of the whole world; becauſe he hath that within him which frets and diſcontents him, which galls his ſpirit, and keeps his mind reſtleſs and uneaſy; and he that does not enjoy himſelf, can enjoy nothing elſe.

Did but men know how much happineſs hath been enjoyed by many a pious and virtuous man in a mean fortune, how quiet and eaſy their minds have been, how much fuller of joy and pleaſure, than the heart of any covetous worldling ever was in his moſt proſperous eſtate, and when *his corn, and wine, and oil abounded*; did we (I ſay) but know this, we ſhould not envy the men of mighty fortunes. *Nam neque divitibus contingunt gaudia ſolis. Rich men are not the only happy people in the world.* If they be not good as well as rich, happineſs is a greater ſtranger to their dwellings, than to the cottages of poorer men.

Now riches are ſo far from helping to make men good, that they are one of the greateſt temptations to them in the world to be otherwiſe; which is the reaſon why our Saviour ſays, *it is ſo very hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven*; becauſe conſidering the powerful and almoſt irreſiſtible temptations of a great eſtate, and the impotency and weakneſs of human nature to govern itſelf in a plentiful

tiful fortune, it is very hard for a rich man to be ſo good as he ought, it requires a great force and firmneſs of reſolution, a very ſolid and vigorous conſtitution of mind, to bear a great fortune, and not to be corrupted by it; and a man hath never more reaſon to implore God's gracious help and aſſiſtance, and to conſult his own beſt and cooleſt thoughts, to know what he ought to do, and how he ought to demean himſelf, than when the outward bleſſings of this life flow in amain upon him; *felicitate corrumpimur, nothing ſooner debaucheth men than proſperity*; and he is a very happy man, whom wealth and a good fortune do not make licentious and diſſolute; becauſe theſe tempt men with the power and opportunity to do all the ill that their wicked hearts can deſign or deſire.

The temptation of riches, and the power that goes along with them, is ſo forcible and prevalent, that the devil, who is a ſagacious ſpirit, and hath great and long experience in this kind, when he was making the experiment whether Chriſt was a mere man, or the Son of God, reſerved this for his laſt temptation, reſolving, if that would not do, to try him no farther. After he had aſſaulted him in ſeveral kinds, he repreſents to him at laſt that which was ſufficient to have ſurfeited two of the moſt inſatiable deſires of human nature, ambition and covetouſneſs, even *all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, in a moment*, or point of time; he brings all the rays of his glory to one point, that the temptation might kindle and take hold the ſooner; and ſays to him, *all this will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worſhip me*. He ſuppoſed with great probability, that if he were but a mere man, the ſtrongeſt and moſt reſolved mind would bend and yield to ſo dazzling a temptation as this; but when he ſaw that this temptation was rejected, he found himſelf baffled, and gave him over; ſince this did not move him, he concluded now, that he was the Son of God indeed, and that it was in vain to tempt him any farther.

From all this it appears, that riches are ſo far from ma-

making men virtuous, that nothing is more dangerous to virtue, than a full condition; if men have not a great degree of grace, as well as discretion, to manage it. Solomon tells us, that the *prosperity of fools destroyeth them.*

And yet how do most of us court this temptation, and are forward to thrust and venture ourselves upon it? There are a great many other things, in which most men make a right judgment of themselves, and will readily acknowledge that they are altogether unfit for them. Every man will not take upon him to be a physician, or a lawyer, to prescribe medicines in dangerous cases, and to give counsel to men in knotty and difficult points about their estates; but every man thinks himself fit enough to be rich, and sufficiently qualified to manage a great estate, if he can but get it; when perhaps there are few things in the world, which men are more insufficient for, than to wield and govern a great fortune, nor wherein there is greater danger of miscarriage. It is not every body's talent to be wealthy and wise, rich and innocent.

2. As for the outward evils of this life, such as want and contempt, bodily pains and diseases, unhappiness in friends and relations, a great estate is by no means a sufficient security or remedy to a covetous man against these.

(1.) As for want: And surely one would think, that if riches were good for any thing, they are a very proper remedy against this evil, and a most certain and infallible cure of it; but experience tells us quite otherwise: *Socrates* was wont to say, that, "To want nothing is the privilege of the Deity, "and proper to God alone; but to stand in need "of as few things as may be, is the privilege of a "wise and good man, and a state of happiness next "to that of God himself; because he that hath the "fewest wants is the most easily supplied, and is next "to him that is self-sufficient." Now a man of moderate desires hath infinitely fewer wants than a covetous man; and because his desires are moderate, a moderate estate will satisfy them: but the wants

of a covetous mind are never to be supplied, because it hath ordered the matter so cunningly, as to want even that which it hath. Such a man does not get riches to supply his wants, but is content to want that he may be rich; insomuch that he hath not the heart to use his estate for the supply of his real necessities. How many do almost starve themselves in the midst of plenty and abundance? There is no greater sign of poverty than to be deeply in debt; now the covetous man lives and dies in debt to himself. Some men have been so shamefully penurious and stingy to themselves, as even *to dy to save charges*, which yet perhaps is the most generous thing they ever did in their whole lives, in respect to the world; because by this means some body may come to the enjoyment of their estates; and that great dunghill which they have been so long raking together, may by this means come to be spread abroad for the publick benefit.

So that if a covetous man were possessed of the wealth of both the Indies, all this would not free him from want. A poor man's wants may be satisfied, when he hath obtained what he wants: But the covetous man labours of an incurable want; because he wants that which he hath, as well as that which he hath not.

(2.) As for contempt, riches will not secure a covetous man against this neither; nay, so far is it from that, that he is commonly more ridiculous and despised for living poor in the midst of abundance, than if he were really so. Did I say, really so? He is the most really poor of all other men. For as one says well, *The rich poor man is emphatically poor.*

(3.) Neither will riches free men from bodily illness and pain. The rich are liable to as many diseases, and as sharp pains as the poor, and they have commonly less patience to bear them than the poor; because they have not been inured to other sorts of evils. They that have been accustomed to labour, are generally best fitted to bear pain; the rich are commonly more tender and delicate, and have a quicker sense of pain, more matter, and greater quan-

quantity of humours to feed a diſeaſe, and to inflame it to a greater height.

I muſt not here forget that there is a ſort of rich men, I mean the penurious miſers, who ſtarve themſelves more than the poor, and fare many times more hardly; and for this reaſon, tho' they be not in danger of the diſeaſes that come from intemperance, and a plentiful table; yet they are liable to the diſeaſes which proceed from ſtarving and emptineſs; which the phyſicians ſay are more dangerous than the other: So that neither the prodigal nor the niggardly rich man is ſecured from bodily pains and diſeaſes, by a great eſtate.

(4.) Neither will riches ſecure a man from being unhappy in his friends and relations. A great eſtate will not make a man's children either more dutiful or wife, than the children of meaner perſons; and if they be not ſo, his eſtate cannot be ſo great an happineſs to him, as *they* may prove an affliction. Solomon tells us, that the very fear and apprehenſion of this did very much imbitter the fruit of all his labour; and he ſeems to ſpeak it ſenſibly, and very probably with a melancholy reflexion upon his ſon Rehoboam, Eccleſ. ii. 18. 19. *Yea I hated all my labour which I had taken under the ſun, becauſe I ſhould leave it unto the man that ſhall be after me; and who knows whether he ſhall be a wiſe man or a fool? Yet ſhall he have rule over all my labour, wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have ſhewed myſelf wiſe under the ſun.* Who knows whether he ſhall be a wiſe man or a fool? he ſeems to ſpeak doubtfully: but he had a very ſhrewd gueſs what kind of man his ſon would make; for he ſpeaks more deſpondingly in the next words, ver. 20. 21. *therefore I went about to cauſe my heart to deſpair of all the labour which I took under the ſun*; that is, when I thought ſeriouſly of it, I began to think that all the pains I had taken to get an eſtate, would be but to little purpoſe; *for there is a man* (ſaith he) *whoſe labour is in wiſdom, and in knowledge, and in equity*, (that is, who by wiſe and honeſt means hath raiſed a great eſtate) *yet to a man that hath not la-*

boured therein, (that is, to a man who is endued with none of theſe qualities) *ſhall he leave it for his portion; this alſo is vanity, and a great evil.*

And as for friends, though the rich man have many that will call themſelves ſo, yet he had almoſt as good have none; for he can hardly ever know whether they be ſo or not, unleſs he chance to fall into poverty, and then indeed the change of his condition may give him that advantage and opportunity, which otherwiſe he is never like to have, of diſcerning between his friends and his flatterers. Thus you ſee that riches are no ſecurity againſt the moſt conſiderable evils which attend us in the courſe of our lives.

II. When we come to dy, nothing will miniſter leſs comfort to us, at that time, than a great eſtate. It is then a very ſmall pleaſure to a man, to reflect how much he hath gotten in the world, when he ſees that he muſt leave it; nay, like the young man in the goſpel, *he goes away ſo much the more ſorrowful, becauſe he hath great poſſeſſions.* All the things of this world ſeem very inconſiderable to a man, when he approaches to the confines of the other: for when he ſees that he muſt leave this world, then he would fain make a virtue of neceſſity, and begins to change his apprehenſions of theſe things, and to have very ſlight and mean thoughts of them, when he is convinced he can enjoy them no longer. What the philoſopher was wont to ſay of the pleaſures of this world, is as true of riches, and all the other enjoyments of it; That, "if they did but put on the "ſame countenance, and look with the ſame face, "when they come to us, that they will do when "they turn from us, and take their leave of us, we "ſhould hardly entertain them."

Now if a man have placed his chief happineſs in this world, as the covetous man does in his riches, his great trouble when he comes to dy will be, that he muſt leave them. Nothing could be more ſeverely ſaid to the covetous man, than that which God ſays to the rich man in the parable, *Thou fool, this night ſhall thy ſoul be required of thee, and then whoſe ſhall theſe things be?* For of all things in the world,

world, such men cannot endure to think of parting with these things, or that what they have got with such great care and labour, should come to the possession of another.

And therefore when we are so hot and eager in the pursuit of these things, we should do well to consider, *how they will appear to us in a dying hour.* And this consideration well imprinted upon our minds, will make us very careful, to treasure up other kind of comforts to ourselves against such a time, and to labour after those things which we shall never grow out of conceit withal, but shall value them to the last, and then most of all when we come to dy, and leave this world. For as a Poet of our own says excellently,

'Tis not that which first we love,
But what dying we approve.

Thus I have done with the *fourth* thing, whereby the evil and unreasonableness of covetousness doth appear, namely, that the happiness of human life doth not consist in a great estate; *the life of man doth not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.* The great ends of religion, and covetousness, are very different. The great end which religion proposeth to itself, is happiness: but the great end which covetousness proposeth, is riches; which are neither a necessary nor a probable means of happiness. I should now have proceeded to the fifth and last particular; namely, that riches are so far from being the happiness of human life, that they usually contribute very much to our misery and sorrow; as will appear, if we consider these four things:

First, The labour and care which covetous men are at in the getting of a great estate.

Secondly, The anxiety of keeping it, together with the fears of losing it.

Thirdly, The trouble and vexation of having lost it; and,

Fourthly, The dreadful and heavy account which every man must give of a great estate. But these

particulars, together with the application of this whole diſcourſe, I ſhall refer to another opportunity.

SERMON XCIII.

The evil and unreaſonableneſs of covetouſneſs.

LUKE xii. 15.

And he ſaid unto them, take heed and beware of covetouſneſs; for a man's life conſiſteth not in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſeth.

The fourth ſermon on this text.

IN my two laſt diſcourſes on this ſubject, I have repreſented the evil and unreaſonableneſs of the vice of covetouſneſs, in four particulars. I proceed now to the fifth and laſt particular, whereby I told you the evil and unreaſonableneſs of it would appear, *viz.*

That riches are ſo far from being the happineſs of human life, that they uſually contribute very much to our miſery and ſorrow; as will evidently appear, if we conſider theſe four things:

Firſt, The labour and care which the covetous man is at in getting of a great eſtate.

Secondly, The anxiety of keeping it, together with the fears of loſing it.

Thirdly, The trouble and vexation of having loſt it.

Fourthly, The heavy and dreadful account which every man muſt give of a great eſtate.

Firſt, The labour and care which the covetous man hath in getting a great eſtate. He that will be rich, muſt ſweat for it, and refuſe no pains and trouble; he muſt *riſe up early, and ly down late, and eat the bread of carefulneſs*. A ſlave that digs in the mines, or rows in the gallies, is not a greater drudge, than ſome covetous worldlings are; only with this difference, that the covetous man thinks that he labours and takes all theſe pains for himſelf; whereas the ſlave underſtands the matter more truly, and thinks that he does it for another.

But

But beſides the pains he takes, he is full of care and anxiety. How is he, through the greedy deſire of having, racked between the hopes of getting, and the fear of miſſing what he ſeeks? The Apoſtle obſerves what tormenting cares accompany this vice: 1 Tim. vi. 10. *The love of money* (ſaith he) *is the root of all evil*; not only of the evil of ſin, but of the evil likewiſe of trouble and diſquiet. For it follows, *which while ſome coveted after, they have pierced themſelves through with many ſorrows:* Variety of troubles attend them that will be rich.

Secondly, If we conſider the anxiety of keeping what they have got, together with the fear of loſing it again, this is another great part of a covetous man's infelicity. The rich man here in the parable after the text, when he ſaw his eſtate coming upon him ſo faſt, cries out, *what ſhall I do?* Poor man! who would not pity his condition, to ſee him put to this difficulty and diſtreſs, and to hear him make as heavy a moan as the pooreſt man could do! Now that he hath a plentiful harveſt, and his crop hath anſwered, if it were poſſible, his covetous deſire, he is in a great deal of perplexity, and almoſt at his wits end how to diſpoſe of it. He was horribly afraid leſt any of it ſhould be loſt for want of a ſecure place to ſtore it up in; *What ſhall I do, becauſe I have no room where to beſtow my fruits?* Where was the difficulty of this? Why, he was loth to loſe his fruits, and he was loth to lay out money to ſecure them. But upon farther conſideration, he reſolves of the two evils to chuſe the leaſt; and he ſaid, *this will I do, I will pull down my barns, and build greater, and there will I beſtow all my fruits, and my goods.* But why could he not let the barns he had ſtand, and build more? No, that he did not think ſo well, he loved to ſee all his good things at one view, and what a goodly ſhow they would make together. Beſides that, it is the humour of covetouſneſs, when it breaks out into expence, to over-do; the miſer's buildings are like his feaſts, always extravagant. The covetous man (as to the buſineſs of expence) is like a coward as to fighting, he declines it as long as he

can,

can; but when he is pushed to the last necessity, he grows desperate and lays about him.

Tantis parta malis, curâ majore metuque
Servantur. misera est magni custodia census.

Riches which are got with so much trouble, are not kept without greater fear and care. A covetous man is in nothing more miserable, than in the anxiety and care of disposing and securing what he hath got. When a man's desires are endless, his cares and fears will be so too.

Thirdly, As great an evil as any of the former, is the vexation of having lost these things. If by any accident the man happens to be deprived of them, then he takes on heavily, hangs down his head and mourns, *as a man would do for his first-born*; and is ready to cry out with Micah, *they have taken away my gods, and what have I more?* Upon every little loss the covetous man is undone, though he have a hundred times more left than he knows what to do withal. So deeply are the hearts of earthly-minded men many times pierced with earthly losses, as with *Rachel to refuse to be comforted.* Nay, St. Paul observes, that *the sorrow of the world* sometimes *worketh death*, 1 Cor. vii. 10.

Fourthly, But the saddest consideration of all is, that heavy and dreadful account that must one day be given, both of the getting and using of a great estate. They that have got an estate by fraud and falshood, or by oppression and *grinding the face of the poor*, may read their doom at large, James v. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. *Go to now ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you; your riches are corrupted, and your garments moth-eaten; your gold and silver is cankered, and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire: Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold the hire of the labourers which have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth; and the cries of them which have reaped, are entred into the ears of the Lord of Sab-*

Sabbaoth. Ye have lived in pleaſure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nouriſhed your hearts as in a day of ſlaughter.

And we muſt be accountable likewiſe for the uſing of our eſtates. God gives them to us in truſt, and the greater they are, the more we are to account for. So much as we need is ours, but beyond what will ſupport us, and be a convenient proviſion for our families, in the rank God hath placed them; all that is given to us, that we may give it to others: and indeed it is not ours; we are the proprietors of it in reſpect of men, but in reſpect of God we are but truſtees, and ſtewards, and God will require an account of us how we have diſpoſed of it.

And can there be a more reigning madneſs among men, than to take care only to increaſe their account more and more, by receiving much; whereas our great care and concernment ſhould be to clear our account, by laying out what we receive, according to the truſt repoſed in us? How much we ſhall receive of the things of this world, is in the care and will of our maſter; but our care and fidelity is ſeen in laying it out as we ought. Among men (ſays one) it is well enough if a ſteward can give an account of ſo much laid out, and ſo much in caſh, and upon this he ſhall have his diſcharge: But we cannot this way clear our account with God; for it is not offering him his own again that will ſatisfy him, as we may learn from the parable of the talents. So that upon the whole matter, we ſhould be ſo far from envying the rich, that we ſhould rather envy the ſafety and happineſs of thoſe who are not intruſted with ſuch dangerous bleſſings, and who are free from the temptations of a plentiful fortune, and the curſe of a covetous mind, and from the heavy account of a great eſtate.

I come now, in the laſt place, to make ſome application of this diſcourſe to ourſelves.

I. Let our Saviour's caution take place with us, let theſe words of his ſink into our minds, *Take heed and beware of covetouſneſs.* Our Saviour, I told you, doubles the caution, that we may double our care.

It

It is a sin very apt to steal upon us, and slily to insinuate itself into us under the specious pretence of industry in our callings, and a provident care of our families; but however it may be coloured over, it is a great evil, dangerous to ourselves, and mischievous to the world. Now to kill this vice in us, besides the considerations before-mentioned, taken from the evil and unreasonableness of it, I will urge these three more:

1. That the things of this world are uncertain.

2. That our lives are as uncertain as these things: And,

3. That there is another life after this.

1. The uncertainty of the things of this world. This should very much cool our affections toward them, that after all our care and diligence for the obtaining of them, we are not sure to enjoy them; we may be deprived of them by a thousand accidents. This consideration *Solomon* urgeth, to take men off from an over-eager pursuit of these things, Prov. xxiii. 5. *Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make to themselves wings, they fly away as an eagle towards heaven.* After we have sat brooding over an estate many years, it may all on a sudden, before we are aware, take wing, and fly away, like an eagle towards heaven, soaring suddenly out of our sight, and never to return again.

And the same argument St. Paul useth, to take off mens affections from the world, 1 *Cor.* vii. 31. because the *fashion of this world passeth away*; παράγει τὸ σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου. He compares the things of this world to a scene, which is presently changed, and vanisheth almost as soon as it appears. Now seeing these things are so uncertain, we should take heed how we fix our hearts too much upon them; we should not make love to any thing that is so fickle and inconstant as this world is. We should be afraid to contract too near and intimate a friendship with any thing which will forsake us, after we have courted it with so much importunity, and purchased it with so much pains, and endeavoured to secure it with so much caution and tenderness.

2. Our

2. Our lives are as uncertain as theſe things. If our eſtates remain with us, we are continually in danger of being removed from them. And (as one ſays) it is folly to build our hopes upon a match, where both parties are ſo uncertain and inconſtant. Why ſhould we place our deareſt affections upon things which we are not ſure to enjoy one moment? *Thou fool, this night ſhall thy ſoul be taken from thee, and then whoſe ſhall theſe things be?* I remember Seneca tells us a real ſtory, juſt anſwerable to the rich man in the parable, of an acquaintance of his, who by long and great induſtry had arrived to a vaſt eſtate; and juſt when he began to enjoy it, after one of the firſt good meals which perhaps he ever made in his life, that very night his ſoul was taken from him, for preſently after ſupper he died. *In ipſo actu bene ſedentium rerum, in ipſo procurrentis fortunæ impetu. In the height of his proſperity, and in the full career of his good fortune.*

But if we live to enjoy for any time what we have got, we ſhould remember that our life is but a paſſage through the world, and that we are but *pilgrims and ſtrangers in the world, as all our fathers were; that we have here no abiding place, no continuing city*, but are travelling towards our own country. And why ſhould we load ourſelves whilſt we are upon our journey, and cumber ourſelves with thoſe things which will be of no uſe to us there, whither we are going.

But the great wonder of all is, that this vice ſhould ſo ſtrongly reign, and even grow upon men in old age, and get ſtrength, as weakneſs creeps upon us. This very thought that we are to dy, ſhould work in us a great indifferency towards the things of this world. But when men are convinced they cannot live long, and that every ſtep they take, they are in danger of ſtumbling into the grave, this one would think ſhould wean our affections from this world; and yet uſually none take ſo faſt hold of it, and embrace it ſo kindly, as old men; like friends, who though they know they muſt leave one another, yet are loth to part. Do we not ſee many purſue theſe things

things with as much eagerneſs and appetite, when they are leaving the world, as if they were to ſtay in it a hundred years longer? So that in this ſenſe alſo, they are children again, and are as fond of theſe toys, as if they were juſt beginning the world, and ſetting out for their whole life.

3. There is another life after this, to be ſeriouſly thought on, and provided for with great care: and did men firmly believe this, they would not with Martha, *buſy themſelves about many things, but would mind the one thing neceſſary*, and with Mary, *chuſe that better part, which could not be taken from them.* They would overlook the trifles of this world, and ſcarce take notice of *the things which are ſeen*, but be only intent upon *the things which are not ſeen; becauſe the things which are ſeen are but temporal, but the things which are not ſeen are eternal.* The great concernments of another world would employ their utmoſt care and their beſt thoughts.

Whilſt we are in this world, we ſhould remember that *this is not our home, nor the place of our reſt*; and therefore, as men do in an inn, we ſhould make a ſhift with thoſe indifferent accommodations which the world will afford us, and which we can have upon eaſy terms, without too much trouble and ſtir, becauſe we are not to continue long here; and in the mean time we ſhould chear up our ſelves with the thoughts of the pleaſure and the plenty of our father's houſe, and of that full contentment and ſatisfaction which we ſhall meet withal, when we come to thoſe everlaſting habitations.

So that our great care ſhould be to provide for eternity. If we have unbounded deſires, let us place them upon ſuch objects as are worthy of them. Let us earneſtly covet the beſt things, and ſeek after the true riches. We ſhould ſo mind the world, as to make heaven our great care; as to make ſure to *provide our ſelves bags that wax not old; a treaſure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth*, as our Saviour adviſeth, Luke xii. 33. To the ſame purpoſe is the counſel of St. Paul, 1 Tim. vi. 17, 18, 19. *Charge them that are*

rich

rich in this world, that they be rich in good works, willing to diſtribute, ready to communicate, laying up for themſelves a good foundation (or as the word θεμέλιον, may alſo be rendered, *a good treaſure*) *againſt the time which is to come, that they may lay hold of eternal life.*

I have told you that all theſe things will fail in a ſhort ſpace; we ſhall either be ſtripped of them, or ſeparated from them when we come to dy, and ſhall look over to that vaſt eternity which we muſt ſhortly enter upon. This world, and all the enjoyments of it, will then be as nothing to us, and we ſhall be wholly taken up with the thoughts of another world, and be heartily ſorry that the things of this world have taken up ſo much of our time and care, and that the great and weighty concernments of all eternity have been ſo little minded and regarded by us. Now ſeeing all theſe things ſhall be, pardon me, if I earneſtly beg of you, in the midſt of all your worldly cares, to have ſome conſideration for your immortal ſouls, which are no wiſe provided for by a great eſtate, but are deſigned for nobler enjoyments than this world can afford. When you are taking care to feed and cloath theſe dying bodies, remember that better part of yourſelves, which is to live for ever. Let not all your enquiry be, *what ſhall I eat? or what ſhall I drink? or wherewithal ſhall I be cloathed?* But ſometimes ask yourſelves this queſtion, *what ſhall I do to be ſaved?* I have an immortal ſpirit, it is but fit ſome care ſhould be taken of that, to train it up to eternity, and to make it *fit to be made partaker of an inheritance among them that are ſanctified.*

The firm belief and ſerious conſideration of the great things of another world, cannot ſurely but cool the heat of our affections towards theſe dying and periſhing things, and make us reſolved not to do any thing whereby we may violate the peace of our conſciences, or forfeit our intereſt and happineſs in another world.

II. By way of remedy againſt this vice of covetouſneſs, it is good for men to be contented with

their condition. This the Apoſtle preſcribes as the beſt cure of this vice, Heb. xiii. 5. *Let your converſation be without covetouſneſs, and be content with ſuch things as ye have*; ἀρκούμενοι τοῖς παροῦσιν, being contented with the preſent, and thinking that ſufficient. A covetous man cannot enjoy the preſent, for fear of the future; either out of fear that he ſhall come to want, or out of a ſickneſs and uneaſineſs of mind, which makes that nothing pleaſeth him: But if we could bring our minds to our condition, and be contented with what we have, we ſhould not be ſo eager and impatient after more.

This contentedneſs with our preſent condition doth not hinder, but that men by providence and induſtry, and lawful endeavours, may lay the foundation of a more plentiful fortune than they have at preſent. For provided a man uſe no indirect and diſhoneſt ways to increaſe his eſtate, and do not torment himſelf with anxious cares, do neither make himſelf guilty, nor miſerable, that he may be rich; provided he do not neglect better things to attain theſe, and have not an inſatiable appetite towards them; provided he do not idolize his eſtate, and ſet his heart upon theſe things; and if he can find in his heart to enjoy them himſelf, and to be charitable to others, nothing hinders but that he may be contented with his preſent condition, and yet take all fair opportunities which the providence of God puts into his hands of enlarging his fortune. It is a good character which the poet gives of *Ariſtippus*,

Omnis Ariſtippum decuit color, & ſtatus, & res;
Tentantem majora, ferè præſentibus æquum.

"Every ſtate and condition became him; for though "he endeavoured after more, yet his mind was al-"ways in a manner equal to his preſent condition."

But if a man be diſcontented with the preſent, and reſtleſs becauſe he hath no more, the whole world will not ſatisfy him; and if God ſhould raiſe him from one ſtep to another, he would never think his fortune high enough, and in every degree of it, would be as little contented as he was at firſt. Our Savi-

our

our repreſents this ſort of men by the rich man here in the parable, who, when his barns were full and ready to crack, his mind was not filled; therefore he pulls them down and builds greater; and if he had lived till theſe had been full, they muſt have gone down too, and he would ſtill have built greater. So that though he deſigned when he had raiſed his eſtate to ſuch a pitch, to have ſat down, and taken his eaſe, yet his covetous humour would have been ſtirring again, and ſtill have ſtept in between him and contentment, and for ever have hindred him from arriving at it.

III. By way of direction, I would perſuade thoſe who are rich, to be charitable with what they have. If God hath bleſſed us with abundance, and we would not be like this rich man here in the parable, we muſt lay out of our eſtate, in ways of piety and charity, for the publick good, and for the private relief of thoſe who are in want; for that is the ἀνάδοσις, or moral of the parable; *ſo is he that layeth up treaſures for himſelf, and is not rich towards God.* So ſhall he be, ſuch an iſſue of his folly may every one expect (to be taken away from his eſtate before he comes to enjoy it) *who layeth up treaſures for himſelf, but is not rich towards God*; but does not lay up riches with God. How is that? By works of mercy and charity. This our Saviour calls *laying up for ourſelves treaſure in heaven*, Matth. xvi. 20. And at the 33d verſe of this chapter, he calls giving of alms, *providing for ourſelves bags which wax not old, a treaſure in the heavens which faileth not:* They who do thus, who *are rich in good works, ready to diſtribute, willing to communicate,* are ſaid to *lay up for themſelves a good treaſure againſt the time which is to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life,* 1 Tim. vi. 18, 19. *Extra fortunam eſt quicquid donatur*; "whatſoever we give to the poor is ſafely diſpo-"ſed, and put out of the reach of fortune, becauſe "it is laid up in heaven, where we may expect the "return and recompence of it." Charity to our poor brethren is a certain way of tranſmitting our riches into the other world to make way for our reception there.

So our Lord tells us, Luke xvi. 9. *I ſay unto you, make to your ſelves friends of the mammon of unrighteouſneſs, that when ye ſhall fail* (that is, when you ſhall leave this world, and the enjoyments of it) *they may receive you into everlaſting habitations.*

At the great day of judgment, when we ſhall appear before God, and according to our Saviour's repreſentation of the proceedings of that day, ſhall hear him thus expoſtulating with men, *I was hungry, and ye gave me no meat; thirſty, and ye gave me no drink; naked and ye clothed me not; ſick and in priſon, and ye viſited me not*; what would we then give, how much of our eſtates, if we had them then at our command, would we not be willing to part withal, to have that comfortable ſentence paſt upon us, *Come ye bleſſed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you, before the foundation of the world!* But if we be found among thoſe who would ſpare nothing out of their abundance to any charitable uſe and purpoſe, I have not the heart to tell you how miſerable the condition of ſuch perſons will be, and how dreadful a doom will be paſſed upon them.

It is a ſad conſideration, that there are ſome perſons in the world, who ſeem to be only defective in this duty; like the young man in the goſpel, who lacked but *this one thing* to make him perfect; *he had kept the commandments from his youth*, and preſerved himſelf from thoſe groſs ſins which the law did plainly forbid; and yet for want of *this one thing* he parted from his Saviour, and, for any thing we know, fell ſhort of eternal life. There are many who are very devout and religious, much in prayer and faſting, and all the other frugal exerciſes of piety, which coſt them no money; but yet are very defective in alms and charity, which in ſcripture are ſo frequently joined with the faſtings and prayers of good men; and by this means, all their devotion and diligence in the other parts of religion is loſt, and will not bring them to heaven. And is it not great pity, that they who are not far from the kingdom of God, ſhould fall ſhort of it? that they who in moſt

other

other things, bid so fair for heaven, should break with God upon this single point?

I know men have several ways to deceive their own hearts, and to defend themselves against all these assaults.

First, They say, they are injurious to no man in not being charitable. And it is true, that in human courts the poor can have no action against the rich for want of charity to them; but yet for all that, they do injuriously detain that which doth not of right belong to them. They are cruel and hard hearted, and they are guilty of high breach of trust, in respect of God, whose stewards they are, and who hath dealt so liberally with them in the things of this life, on purpose to oblige them to be so to others. That which thou storest up, without regard to the necessities of others, is unlawfully detained by thee, since God intended it should have been *for bread to the hungry*, and *cloaths to the naked*, and for help and relief *of those who are ready to perish*. For why art thou rich, and another poor; but that thou mightest exercise thy charity upon those fitting objects which the providence of God presents to thee? It had been easy for God (since *the earth is his and the fulness thereof*) so to have contrived things, that every man should have had a sufficiency, and have been in a moderate condition; but then a great many virtues would have been shut out of the world, and lost, for want of opportunity to exercise them. Where then had been the poor man's patience, and the rich man's pity, and the contentedness of men of moderate fortune?

Secondly, Men say that they have children to provide for. And do so in God's name, for he allows us to do it liberally; but unless their condition and wealth set them above an ordinary calling, do not chuse so to provide for them, as to take them off from all employment, lest you put them in the ready way to be undone; have a care of leaving them no other business, but to spend what you have left them; if you so do, they will in all probability do that work very effectually, and make as much haste to

be poor, as you did to make them rich. If men could be but contented to do that which is beſt for their children, they might do a great deal better for themſelves, by diſpoſing what they have to ſpare in charity.

Thirdly, Others would fain excuſe themſelves from this duty at preſent, by telling what they intend to do when they come to dy, that is, when they can keep what they have no longer. It ſeems then thou wilt leave it to thy executor to do good in thy ſtead. This ſhews thou haſt no great heart to the buſineſs, when thou deferreſt it as long as ever thou canſt. But why wilt thou truſt another with the diſpoſal of thy charity, rather than thyſelf? This is hardly to offer either a *reaſonable* or a *living ſacrifice to God*, to do good only when we are dead. It is well that God hath made all men mortal, and that *it is appointed for all men once to dy*; otherwiſe ſome men would never do good at all.

Wherefore ſetting aſide theſe, and all other excuſes, which will not be admitted, nor will any of us have the face to plead them at the day of judgment; I ſay, ſetting aſide all excuſes whatſoever, let us reſolve to do good with what we have, whilſt we can; and to that end let us lay aſide ſome portion of what God hath bleſt us withal, for the uſes of piety and charity, and let it bear ſome decent proportion to what God hath given us.

There is never want of proper objects for our largeſt charity, and now leſs than ever. Beſides theſe at home, which preſent themſelves to us in great numbers every day, God hath ſent us many from abroad, who call loud upon us for our pity and help, both as they are reduced to the greateſt extremity, and are ſufferers in the beſt cauſe, that of our common religion, which ought now to be dearer to us than ever. Let us ſhew mercy now, as we expect mercy from others, in any day of our diſtreſs in this world, and as ever we hope, whenever we come to appear before the judgment-ſeat of Chriſt, to find mercy with the Lord in that day.

Conſider what I have ſaid upon this argument, and

and let this extraordinary kind of caution, which our Saviour here gives, make a deep impreſſion upon your minds; *Take heed and beware of covetouſneſs; for a man's life conſiſteth not in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſeth.*

SERMON XCIV.

Religion our firſt and great concernment.

MATT. vi. 33.

But ſeek ye firſt the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs; and all theſe things ſhall be added unto you.

IN the latter part of this chapter, our Saviour doth in a long diſcourſe caution his diſciples againſt an inordinate care about the things of this life, which he concludes with a ſtrict charge to make religion their firſt and great concernment, and above all things to take care to ſecure to themſelves the happineſs of another life; *But ſeek ye firſt the kingdom of God and his righteouſneſs*, &c. In the handling of which words, I ſhall do theſe four things:

Firſt, I ſhall explain what is here meant by *the kingdom of God and his righteouſneſs*.

Secondly, What by *ſeeking* of theſe.

Thirdly, I ſhall lay down ſome neceſſary and plain directions, which if we obſerve, we cannot miſcarry in this matter.

Fourthly, I ſhall ſet before you ſome of the moſt proper and powerful motives and encouragements to the minding of this great intereſt and concernment; among which I ſhall particularly conſider the argument or encouragement here uſed in the text, *and all theſe things ſhall be added unto you.*

Firſt, I ſhall explain to you what is here meant by *the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs*.

I. What

I. What is meant by *the kingdom of God*. And there are two famous acceptations of this phraſe, and both of them very frequent in the New Teſtament. Sometimes it is uſed to ſignify the ſtate of the goſpel, or the Chriſtian religion, which by the Jews was called *the kingdom of God*, or *the kingdom of the Meſſias*, as Mark i. 15. *The kingdom of God is at hand*; that is, the ſtate or diſpenſation of the goſpel is now approaching, and ready to take place. Luke xvii. 20. The Phariſees demanding of our Saviour, *when the kingdom of God ſhould come*, that is, when the reign of the Meſſias ſhould commence; he anſwers them, *the kingdom of God cometh not with obſervation*; that is, not with any temporal pomp and ſplendor, ſo as to draw the eyes of people after it, as the Jews did vainly imagine; but the *kingdom of God*, ἐντὸς ὑμῶν ἐστιν, *is among you*; not *within you*, as our tranſlation hath improperly rendered it; *the kingdom of God* (he tells them) is already come unto you, the Meſſias is among you, and ye are not aware of him. In the like ſenſe this phraſe is uſed, Matt. xxi. 43. *The kingdom of God*, (that is the goſpel) *ſhall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.* And ſo likewiſe the phraſe of *the kingdom of heaven* is uſed, Matt. xi. 11. where, ſpeaking of John the baptiſt, our Saviour ſaith, that *among them that were born of women, there hath not riſen a greater than John the baptiſt*; that is, there was no greater perſon than he under the Jewiſh diſpenſation, *and yet he that is leaſt in the kingdom of heaven*, that is, under the diſpenſation of the goſpel, *is greater than he.*

Now though this ſenſe of *the kingdom of God* be not wholly excluded in the text, yet there is another ſenſe of this phraſe very uſual likewiſe in the ſcripture, and which is more agreeable to the ſcope of our Saviour's argument and diſcourſe, and ſo it ſignifies that future ſtate of happineſs and glory which good men ſhall be advanced to in another world, in oppoſition to this life, and the enjoyments of it, which our Saviour had before forbidden his diſciples to be ſo ſolicitous about. *Take ye no thought, ſaying,*

ing, what ſhall we eat? or what ſhall we drink? or wherewithal ſhall we be cloathed? And then it follows in direct oppoſition to this inordinate and ſolicitous care about worldly things, *but ſeek ye firſt the kingdom of God and his righteouſneſs*; that is, be not ſo ſolicitous about the conveniencies and neceſſaries of this life, as about the happineſs of the other, and the means to it. And this ſenſe of this phraſe of *the kingdom of God*, is ſo very frequent in the New Teſtament, that I ſhall not need to give particular inſtances of it.

II. What is meant by righteouſneſs; *ſeek ye firſt the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs. Righteouſneſs*, in the ſtricteſt and moſt proper ſenſe of the word, ſignifies the particular virtue of juſtice; and very frequently in the Old Teſtament it is uſed for Charity to the poor, or almſgiving, Pſal. xxxvii. 25. 26. *I have been young, and now am old, yet have I not ſeen the righteous forſaken, nor his ſeed begging bread; he is ever merciful, and lendeth*; and Pſal. cxii. 9. *he hath diſperſed, he hath given to the poor, his righteouſneſs endureth for ever.* But righteouſneſs in its largeſt and moſt extended ſenſe, comprehends all the virtues of a good man; and ſo it ſignifies here in the text, and in many other places of ſcripture.

So that *the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs*, comprehends the whole buſineſs of religion, our laſt end, which is eternal life and happineſs in another world; and the way and means to this end; which is righteouſneſs, or that univerſal goodneſs which God requires of us, and whereof he himſelf is a pattern and example to us; for which reaſon it is called *his righteouſneſs*. And in this ſenſe of our laſt end, and the way and means to it, *the kingdom of heaven*, and *righteouſneſs*, are uſed in another place, even of this ſermon of our Saviour's upon the mount, Matt. v. 20. *Except your righteouſneſs ſhall exceed the righteouſneſs of the Scribes and Phariſees, ye ſhall in no caſe enter into the kingdom of heaven*; where *righteouſneſs* is made the neceſſary means and condition of eternal life. I proceed, in the

Second place, to explain what is meant by *ſeeking firſt*

firſt the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs. And this ſignifies the greateſt intention of mind, and earneſtneſs of endeavour about the buſineſs of religion, in order to our attaining of eternal happineſs; ſuch a ſerioufneſs and earneſtneſs of endeavour as earthly-minded men uſe about the things of this world. *For after all theſe things* (ſays our Saviour immediately after the text) *do the gentiles ſeek*; τὰ ἔθνη ἐπιζητεῖ, which words ſignify an intenſe care, and vigorous endeavour; *but ſeek ye firſt the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs*; that is, be ye, who profeſs yourſelves Chriſtians, as intent upon the buſineſs of religion, and the ſalvation of your ſouls, as the heathen, who are in a great meaſure ignorant of God and another life, are about the things of this life.

And here are two things to be explained:

I. What is here meant by *ſeeking the kingdom of God and his righteouſneſs*; and,

II. What by *ſeeking them in the firſt place.*

For the *firſt*: A ſincere and earneſt *ſeeking of the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs,* does imply in it theſe four things:

1. A fixed deſign and reſolution as to the end; that we do not only propound to ourſelves the eternal happineſs and ſalvation of our ſouls as our chief end, but that we be immoveably fixed upon it, and always have it in our aim and deſign; that here we ſet up our reſolution, if it be poſſible, to be happy for ever; that we have this end always in our eye, and be firmly reſolved to do all that we can towards attaining of it.

Not that we are obliged always actually to think upon it; but to have it frequently in our minds, and habitually to intend and deſign it, ſo as to make it the ſcope of all our endeavours and actions, and that every thing we do be either directly and immediately in order to it, or ſome way or other ſubſervient to this deſign, or however not inconſiſtent with it; like the term and end of a man's journey, towards which the traveller is continually tending, and hath it always habitually in his intention, though he doth not always think of it every ſtep that he takes, and though

though he be not always directly advancing and moving towards it, yet he never knowingly goes out of the way. And though he bait and lodge by the way, and does many other things which do not directly ſet him forward, yet they are all ſubſervient to his journey, or in proſecution of it; or at leaſt no wilful deviations from it. Thus it ſhould be with us, while we are ſojourning in this world; our fixed aim and deſign ſhould be to get to heaven, and thither we ſhould be continually tending in our deſires and endeavours.

And if this reſolution be deeply rooted and fixed in our minds, it will govern all our actions, and keep them ſteady to their main end. Whereas, if we be uncertain and unreſolved upon our great end, and be divided between the happineſs of the next life, and the preſent enjoyments of this, we ſhall be fickle and unſteady in all our motions. He that hath two ends, can purſue neither vigorouſly, but while he is moving towards the one, he leans and inclines to the other, and like a needle between two loadſtones, is always in a doubtful and trembling condition; inclines to both, but is conſtant to neither: And this is the meaning of that aphoriſm of St. James, *the double-minded man is unſtable in all his ways.* He that is unreſolved as to his main end, hath two minds, and can proſecute nothing vigorouſly: But if our mind be once fixed and reſolved, that will determine and govern all our motions, and inſpire us with diligence, and zeal, and perſeverance in the proſecution of our end.

2. *Seeking the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs,* implies inceſſant care and diligence as to the means; that we make religion our buſineſs, and exerciſe ourſelves in the duties of it, both in publick and private, at proper times and ſeaſons, with the ſame ſeriouſneſs and application of mind, as men do in their callings and profeſſions, for the gaining of wealth and preferment, eſpecially on the Lord's day, which God hath taken to himſelf, and ſet apart for the duties of his worſhip and ſervice. Not that we are excuſed from minding religion at other times; but that

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thoſe who are preſſed and ſtraitened by the neceſſary cares of this life, may be ſure to mind it then, and may have no colour of excuſe for the neglect of it at that time, which God hath allotted for that very purpoſe, and which it is unlawful to employ about our worldly affairs. God expects that we ſhould ſerve him at other times, that we ſhould live in an habitual ſenſe of him, and (as *Solomon* expreſſeth it, Prov. xxiii. 17.) *Be in the fear of the Lord all the day long*; ſo as to be careful not to offend or tranſgreſs in any thing, and ſo as to redeem all opportunities for the exerciſe of piety and devotion; but this day he peremptorily challengeth to himſelf, and expects we ſhould employ it in his ſervice, and dedicate it to religion, to the contemplation of God and heavenly things, and the care of our immortal ſouls, with the ſame ſerioufneſs and diligence, as we do upon other days *labour for the bread which periſheth*; and the leſs leiſure we have upon other days for this purpoſe, the more entirely ſhould we devote and conſecrate this day to the purpoſes and duties of religion.

Not but that our whole life, and all the actions of it, ſhould be under the government of religion, and directed by the laws and rules of it; and it ſhould be our continual care and endeavour to pleaſe God in all things, and we ſhould take as much pains, and be as heartily concerned to be good men, as the men of the world are to grow rich and great in this world; nay ſo much more, by how much it is a better and nobler deſign to improve in grace and virtue, than to proſper and thrive in our temporal eſtate; and we do not in good earneſt *ſeek the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs*, if this be not our great ſtudy and endeavour, to ſubdue our luſts and govern our paſſions, and in a word, to reform whatever is amiſs in the inward frame and temper of our minds, and in our outward converſation. And indeed nothing does require greater diligence, and attention, and care, than for a man to become truly and thoroughly good; to be meek, and humble, and patient, and contented, and reſigned to the will of God in every condition; to be peaceable, and charitable, and placable, and ready

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to forgive; theſe are great and difficult things, and whatever we think, not the work of a wiſh, or the effect of a ſudden reſolution before the receiving of the holy ſacrament, no, nor the fruit of frequent and fervent prayers, without the hearty concurrence of our own care and endeavour, to render our lives ſuch, as we pray God by his grace to aſſiſt and enable us to be.

3. *Seeking the kingdom of God and his righteouſneſs*, does further imply zeal and earneſtneſs in the purſuit of this deſign: And this is a degree above diligence; for zeal is an ardour and fervency of mind in the proſecution of a thing for which you are greatly concerned, and which we vehemently deſire to obtain; it is the hotteſt and moſt intenſe degree of our affection towards any thing, of our deſire and love, mixed with anger at every thing that ſtands in our way, and hinders us from obtaining what we ſeek after; ſuch an heat as ambition does commonly inſpire men withal, in the purſuit of power and preferment. Such ought to be the temper of our minds, and the edge of our ſpirits, in *ſeeking the kingdom of God*, as does uſually poſſeſs men in ſeeking the kingdoms of this world, and the glory of them. We muſt remember that it is a kingdom which we ſeek for, and aſpire after; not like the unſtable and tottering kingdoms of this world, but *a kingdom which cannot be ſhaken*, as the Apoſtle calls it.

So that the greatneſs of the deſign, and the excellency of what we ſeek after, will juſtify and warrant the higheſt degree of a diſcreet zeal and fervour in the proſecution of it; and therefore no wonder that the ſcripture in this matter uſeth words that import the greateſt vehemency and earneſtneſs, bidding us *to ſtrive to enter in at the ſtrait gate, to labour, and watch, to run, and wreſtle, and fight*, and, in a word, *to give all diligence to make our calling and election ſure.*

Laſtly, *Seeking the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs*, does imply patience and perſeverance in our endeavours after them, and that we never ceaſe our purſuit of them, till we have obtained them; and this,

notwithstanding all the difficulties and discouragements, the opposition and persecution that we meet with *for righteousness sake:* For this we must expect and reckon upon before hand, to encounter many difficulties, and find many discouragements in the ways of religion; for *strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leads to life,* as our Lord himself hath told us: Nay, we must count to be grievously *persecuted for righteousness sake,* and, if God see it good for us, to pass *through many tribulations,* before we shall enter *into the kingdom of God*; and therefore we had need to be armed with a great deal of patience, and a very firm and obstinate resolution, to enable us to bear up, and to hold out against all these; for this is a necessary qualification for our *seeking the kingdom of God, and his righteousness.* So our Lord hath told us, Matth. x. 22. *He that endureth to the end, shall be saved*; if we hope to receive the *crown of life,* we must *be faithful to the death,* Rev. ii. 10. And to the same purpose St. Paul declares, Rom. ii. 7. that they only shall be made partakers of *eternal life, who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality.*

You see what is meant by *seeking the kingdom of God, and his righteousness*; it remains briefly to be shewn, in the second place, what is meant by seeking these first; *seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness*; that is, let this be your main and principal design, so as to take place of all others in your esteem and affections, in your aim and endeavour; in comparison of this, mind nothing else, not the comforts and conveniencies, no, not the necessaries of life, *what ye shall eat, and what ye shall drink, and wherewithal ye shall be clothed.* These you see our Saviour instanceth in before the text, as not to be regarded and taken care of, when they come in competition with *the kingdom of God, and his righteousness.* And our Saviour tells us elsewhere, that not only none of the comforts and necessaries of life are to be valued against him, and his religion, but that even this temporal life itself, as dear as it is to us, is to be parted withal, and given up, rather than to quit the profession

feſſion of his truth and religion, Matth. x. 37, 38. *He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth ſon or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me.* He inſtanceth in the neareſt relations, thoſe towards whom we have the moſt tender and relenting affections, and yet he tells us, that the conſideration of his truth, and religion ought to take place of theſe, nay, even of life itſelf; for ſo it follows, and *he that taketh not his croſs, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.* St. Luke expreſſeth it more ſtrongly and vehemently, Luke xiv. 26. *If any man come to me,* (that is, take upon him the profeſſion of my religion) *and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and ſiſters, yea, and his own life alſo, he cannot be my diſciple.* When theſe come in competition with our religion, and the great intereſt of our eternal ſalvation, we are to regard and value them no more than if they were the objects of our hatred, but to ſet aſide all conſideration of affection to them, ſo far as it would tempt us from conſtancy in our religion, and the care of our ſouls.

So that when our Saviour bids us *firſt to ſeek the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs,* his meaning is, that religion, and the concernments of our ſouls, and the eternal happineſs of them in another world, ſhould be our firſt and chief care; and that all other things ſhould be made ſubordinate and ſubſervient to this great deſign, and to be no farther minded by us, than they really are ſo: For that which is our great end, will ſubdue all other things, and bring them into ſubjection to it, and will reject them, and throw them aſide, if they be inconſiſtent with it. If heaven be our utmoſt aim, and in order to that, it be our great ſtudy and endeavour to be righteous and holy, this reſolution and deſign, ſincerely entertained, will over-rule all other conſiderations, and make all the things of this world to ſtoop and give way to that which is our chief end, the eternal happineſs and ſalvation of our ſouls. And thus I have done with the ſecond thing I propoſed, namely, what is meant by

ſeeking the kingdom of God and his righteouſneſs; and what by *ſeeking them firſt*.

I proceed in the third place, to lay down ſome plain rules for our direction and furtherance in *ſeeking the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs*; that is, in the great buſineſs of religion.

Firſt, Let us always live under a lively and powerful ſenſe of another world; that we are placed here in this world, but for a little while, and that wholly in order to our preparation for a better and happier life. Let this thought be often in our minds, that eternity is the moſt conſiderable duration, and the next world the place of our everlaſting abode, where we muſt dwell and continue for ever; and therefore our preſent ſtate is but of little moment and conſideration to us, but only in order to our future and everlaſting condition. We may pleaſe ourſelves here for a little while with toys and trifles, with dreams and ſhadows of pleaſure and happineſs, and may be exerciſed with ſome troubles and afflictions for a ſhort ſpace, *for a moment* (as the Apoſtle calls it) *our light afflictions which are but for a moments*, and ſo indeed it is, compared with all eternity; but the ſubſtantial and durable happineſs or miſery remain for men in the other world, and will certainly be their portion, according as they have demeaned themſelves in this world.

Now the ſerious conſideration of this cannot fail to put us upon vigorous preparations for another world, and to make us wholly intent upon our eternal concernments, and to reſolve, whatever becomes of us in this world, to take effectual care that we may be happy for ever. He that firmly believes the immortality of his ſoul, and a life after death, which will never have an end, muſt needs take into conſideration his whole duration, and bend all his care and thoughts, how he may avoid the greateſt and moſt laſting miſery, and ſecure to himſelf an immortality of bliſs and happineſs.

Secondly, Let us be always under a conviction of the abſolute and indiſpenſable neceſſity of holineſs and righteouſneſs, as the only way and means whereby

by the kingdom of God is to be attained, and that holineſs and happineſs are not to be ſeparated, the one being a neceſſary condition and qualification for the other; and conſequently, that it is the vaineſt thing in the world for any man to hope to enter into the kingdom of God, without endeavouring after his righteouſneſs; there is ſo ſtrong a connexion between them, that a man may as reaſonably expect to be well and at eaſe without health, as to be happy without holineſs; for this makes us like to God, and our likeneſs and conformity to God, is that alone which can make us capable of the bleſſed ſight and enjoyment of God. We muſt be *partakers of a divine nature*, in order to our participation of the divine bleſſedneſs. And the conſideration of this will effectually engage us to *ſeek the righteouſneſs of God*, without which we ſhall never enter into his kingdom; and to *follow holineſs, without which no man ſhall ſee the Lord.*

Thirdly, Let us always remember that righteouſneſs is of a great extent, and comprehends in it all goodneſs; it takes in all the duties of religion, and the practice of all of them: It is a complication of all graces and virtues, of all the parts and ingredients, of all the duties and offices of a good man. To denominate a man *righteous*, all cauſes muſt concur; all the eſſential principles and parts of religion and goodneſs muſt meet together; knowledge and practice, faith and good works, right opinions and real virtues, an orthodox profeſſion and a holy life, abſtaining from ſin and doing of righteouſneſs, purity of heart and unſpotted manners, godlineſs and honeſty, the bridling of our tongue, and the government of our paſſions, and *above all things charity, which is the band of perfection.*

For righteouſneſs is our conformity to the law of God, as unrighteouſneſs and ſin is the tranſgreſſion of it. Now this, if it be real and ſincere, will be uniform and univerſal, equally reſpecting all the laws of God, and every part of our known duty, and will not content itſelf with an eſpecial regard to one or two precepts of the law, though never ſo conſide-

rable, and then allow itſelf in the neglect and violation of the reſt; no, nor with the obſervation of the duties of one table of the law, if it over-look the other; no, nor with obedience to all the commandments of God, one only excepted. St. James hath put this very caſe, and determined it, that *he that ſhall keep the whole law, ſave only that he offend in one point, is guilty of all*; that is, he is not ſincere in his obedience to the reſt: And therefore if we *ſeek the righteouſneſs of God*, our righteouſneſs muſt be univerſal; *as he that hath called us is holy, ſo muſt we be holy in all manner of converſation*, in the tenor of our actions, and the whole courſe of our lives: And any one reigning ſin and vice, any groſs and notorious defect in the virtues of a good life, will ſpoil our righteouſneſs, and will effectually ſhut us out of the *kingdom of heaven*.

Fourthly, Let us wiſely ſubordinate the ſeveral parts and duties of religion to one another, according to the intrinſical worth and value of them, that ſo we may mind every part of religion in its due place, and according to the true nature and importance of it. Knowledge and faith are in order to practice, and a good life; and ſignify nothing unleſs they produce that. The means of religion, ſuch as prayer and faſting, diligent reading and hearing the word of God, reverent and devout receiving of the bleſſed ſacrament, are of leſs account and value, than that which is the end of all theſe, which is to make us inwardly and really good, and *fruitful in all the works of righteouſneſs, which by Jeſus Chriſt are to the praiſe and glory of God*. And therefore the means of religion which I have mentioned, are to be regarded and uſed by us, in order to the attaining of theſe ends, without which they are mere formality and hypocriſy, and inſtead of finding acceptance with God, they are *an abomination to him, and his ſoul hates them*.

And ſo likewiſe the circumſtances of religion are leſs conſiderable than the ſubſtantial means and inſtruments of it. And therefore all rites and ceremonies are in religion of leſs conſideration, than the ſubſtance of God's worſhip, and ought always to be ſubor-

ſubordinate to it. In like manner, the moral duties of religion, comprehended under *the two great commandments of the love of God*, and *our neighbour*, becauſe they are of eternal and indiſpenſable obligation, are to be preferred to matters of mere poſitive inſtitution; and where they cannot ſtand together, that which is poſitive ought to be ſet aſide, and to give way for the preſent to that which is moral and good in its own nature, and not only, becauſe it is commanded and enjoined; for in this caſe God hath expreſly declared, that *he will have mercy and not ſacrifice*. Upon which ground our Saviour declares, that the law of the ſabbath ought to give place to works of mercy. Upon the ſame account peace and charity are to be valued above matters of nicety and ſcruple, of doubtful diſpute and controverſy; becauſe the former are unqueſtionably good, the latter doubtfully and uncertainly ſo.

All theſe things ought to be conſidered, and are of great moment to make a man ſincerely and wiſely religious. For men may keep a great ſtir about ſome parts of religion, and be very careful and diligent, zealous and earneſt about the means and inſtruments of religion, and in the exerciſes of piety and devotion, and yet be deſtitute of the power and life of it, and fall ſhort of that inward, and real, and ſubſtantial righteouſneſs, which alone can qualify us for *the kingdom of God*.

The fifth and laſt direction I would give, is this; that we have a particular regard to the great duty of charity, or alms-giving, this being very frequently in ſcripture called *righteouſneſs*, as being an eminent part of religion, and a great evidence of the truth, and ſincerity of our piety. And this our Saviour particularly directs to, as the way to the *kingdom of God*, Luke xii. 33. After this general exhortation, *to ſeek the kingdom of God*, he inſtanceth in charity, as the direct way to it; *give alms, provide for yourſelves bags that wax not old, a treaſure in the heavens which faileth not*. And elſewhere our Saviour ſpeaks of this grace and virtue, as that which, above all others, will make way for

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our admiſſion into heaven, Luke xvi. 9. *I ſay unto you, make to yourſelves friends of the mammon of unrighteouſneſs, that when ye fail, they may receive you* (or ye may be received) *into everlaſting habitations.* And St. Paul calls it *laying in ſtore for yourſelves a good foundation*; or (as the word may better be rendred in this place) *a good treaſure againſt the time to come, that we may lay hold on eternal life*, 1 Tim. vi. 19. St. James ſpeaks of it as a main and moſt eſſential part of religion, and the great evidence of a true and ſincere piety, James i. 27. *Pure religion, and undefiled before God and the Father, is this; to viſit the fatherleſs and widows in their affliction.* Finally, our Lord inſtanceth in this, as the very thing which will admit us into, or ſhut us out of heaven; by the performance whereof we ſhall be abſolved, and for the neglect thereof we ſhall be condemned in the judgment of the great day, Matth. xxv. So that this part of righteouſneſs or religion, ought in a more ſpecial manner to be regarded by us; becauſe upon the performance or neglect of this duty, our eternal happineſs doth ſo much depend.

The fourth and laſt thing only remains to be ſpoken to; which is, to ſet before you the moſt proper and powerful motives and encouragements, to the minding of this great intereſt and concernment. But this will be the ſubject of another diſcourſe.

SER-

SERMON XCV.

Religion, our firſt and great concernment.

MATTH. vi. 33.

But ſeek ye firſt the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs; and all theſe things ſhall be added unto you.

The ſecond ſermon on this text.

THESE words, which I began to diſcourſe upon the laſt day, are a ſtrict charge and command to all Chriſtians, to mind the buſineſs of religion in the firſt place, and to take all imaginable care to ſecure the happineſs of another life; *But ſeek ye firſt the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs; and all theſe things ſhall be added unto you.* In the handling of which argument,

Firſt, I explained what is meant by *the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs.*

Secondly, I ſhewed what is meant by *ſeeking* theſe; and what by ſeeking them *firſt.*

Thirdly I laid down ſome rules for our direction and furtherance in this great buſineſs.

I ſhall now proceed to repreſent to you, in the *Fourth* and *laſt* place, ſome of the moſt proper and powerful arguments and encouragements, to engage us to the minding of this great intereſt and concernment: Among which I ſhall, in the laſt place, particularly conſider the encouragement here given in the text, *Seek ye firſt the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs; and all theſe things ſhall be added unto you.*

Firſt, My firſt argument ſhall be from the worth and excellency of the things we ſeek, *the kingdom of God and his righteouſneſs*; which are certainly the greateſt and beſt things we can ſeek. *The kingdom*

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of God is the eternal ſalvation of our ſouls, everlaſting life and happineſs in another world, which, to animate our endeavours, and to tempt our ambition the more, are ſet forth to us under the notion of a kingdom. And what will not men do to obtain that? what pains will they not take? what hazards will they not run? what difficulties will they not grapple with, and break through if they can, to come at a kingdom? which when they have obtained, they are expoſed to as many, and commonly to more cares and fears, to greater difficulties and dangers in the keeping, than they were for the getting of it: And yet all this men will do for a corruptible crown, for one of the petty kingdoms and principalities of this world, which are continually tottering, and ready to be overturned by open violence, or to be undermined by ſecret treachery. But the kingdom which I am ſpeaking of, and perſuading you and myſelf to ſeek after, is not like the kingdoms of men, and of this world; it is called *the kingdom of God*, to ſignify to us the excellency and ſtability of it; as much beyond any of the kingdoms of this world, as the heavens are high above the earth, and as God is greater than man; *a kingdom which cannot be ſhaken, a crown which fadeth not away*, a ſcepter which cannot be wreſted from us.

But to quit the metaphor, and ſpeak to the thing; the kingdom of God imports the eternal ſalvation of our ſouls; I ſay of our ſouls, which both in reſpect of the dignity of our nature, and their immortal duration, are infinitely more valuable than any of the periſhing things of this world, and ought to be much dearer to us. Other things are without us, they neither conſtitute our being, nor are eſſential to our happineſs; but our ſouls are ourſelves, and the loſs of them is our utter ruin and deſtruction. So that nothing is to be regarded by us with equal care and concernment, as the ſalvation of our immortal ſouls; that is, that we may be reſcued from eternal miſery, and everlaſtingly happy in another world. And can we be at too much coſt and pains upon ſuch a deſign, to eſcape ſo diſmal a condition, ſo dreadful a ruin,

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as that of body and ſoul to all eternity? Can any man be concerned enough to bring about ſo great a good to himſelf? or, can he purchaſe it too dear, whatever he give or part with for it? a good ſo deſirable, and ſo durable, as our being happy for ever. When we purchaſe the things of this world, the riches and honours of it, at the expence of ſo much time and care, and trouble, we pay dear for trifles and fancies; but eternal happineſs is a jewel of ſo ineſtimable a price, that a wiſe merchant will have it at any rate, and *ſell all that he hath to purchaſe it.*

Of ſuch value is the kingdom of God; and next to it is righteouſneſs, which is the only way and means whereby this kingdom is to be attained, and therefore to be ſought by us with the greateſt diligence and earneſtneſs: For that which is the only means to a great and deſirable end, and which alone can make us capable of that end, and which in truth is a degree of it, is valuable next to the end, and almoſt equally with it; and ſuch is righteouſneſs, in reſpect of the kingdom of God; it is the only means to it, it is that alone which qualifies us, and makes us capable of happineſs; nay, it is an eſſential ingredient into it, and that which does in a great meaſure conſtitute the happineſs of heaven: for that temper of mind, that conformity and likeneſs to God, which holineſs and righteouſneſs brings us to, is the true foundation of our happineſs, and according to the beſt apprehenſions we have now of it, is the very formal cauſe and eſſence of our bleſſedneſs. So St. John tells us, 1 John iii. 2. *It doth not yet appear what we ſhall be; but we know, that when he ſhall appear, we ſhall be like him*; that is, we do not now diſtinctly underſtand wherein the happineſs of the next life conſiſts, we are not able to frame a clear and perfect idea of it; but this we know in general, that it conſiſts in our likeneſs to God, in a conformity to the moral perfections of the divine nature, which are expreſt by the name of *purity* and *holineſs*; and therefore every one that hopes for the happineſs of heaven, muſt endeavour after holineſs; *every man that hath this hope in him, muſt purify himſelf, even as he is pure.*

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So that the things which I am preſſing you to ſeek after, are moſt effectually recommended, by telling you what they are; *the kingdom of God* is eternal life and happineſs, and *his righteouſneſs* is univerſal holineſs and goodneſs, without which no man is qualified for this bleſſed ſtate. Now if there be any thing better than goodneſs, any thing more deſirable than a happineſs which hath no bounds, nor no end; do not mind them, nor look after them: But if there be not; then certainly theſe are worthy of the care and endeavour of our whole life.

Secondly, Another conſideration that ſhould very much excite and quicken our endeavour and diligence in ſeeking theſe things, is the difficulty of obtaining them. This, I confeſs, is no encouragement but it is a very good motive and argument to whet our induſtry in ſeeking theſe things, when we plainly ſee that they are not be had upon other terms. And this conſideration our Saviour uſeth to quicken us to ſtrive, and to contend earneſtly for eternal life, Matth. vii. 14. *Becauſe ſtrait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth to life, and few there be that find it*: And Luke xiii. 24. *Strive to enter in at the ſtrait gate; for many, I ſay unto you, will ſeek to enter in, and ſhall not be able.*

Seeking here, in oppoſition to *ſtriving*, is a faint and weak endeavour, which will not carry us through this narrow and difficult paſſage; and this is the reaſon why many miſcarry, who make ſome attempts towards heaven; but they do not ſtrive, they do not put forth any vigorous endeavours to get thither.

Now the difficulty of attaining eternal happineſs, ariſeth from the difficulty of the way and means to it; and it is therefore hard to attain the kingdom of God, becauſe it is hard to attain his righteouſneſs. As deſirable as it is, it muſt be acknowledged very difficult for a man to raiſe himſelf to that temper and diſpoſition of mind, ſo to ſubdue his luſts, and govern his paſſions, to bridle his tongue, and order all the actions of his life, as is neceſſary to qualify him for

for happineſs, and to make him fit to be admitted into the kingdom of God.

And this difficulty is chiefly in ourſelves, but greatly increaſed by temptation and oppoſition from without: chiefly, I ſay, in ourſelves, from the ſtrong bias of our evil and corrupt inclinations, and the ſtrong power of vitious habits and cuſtoms, which, when they are grown inveterate, do tyrannize over us, and make us perfect ſlaves, and lead us captive at their pleaſure; ſo that our nature muſt be quite changed, and as the Apoſtle expreſſeth it, we muſt be *renewed in the ſpirit of our minds*, our ſouls muſt be new moulded and faſhioned; we muſt be, as it were, *created*, and *born again*, before we can *enter into the kingdom of God*. In this our Saviour is poſitive and peremptory, John iii. 33. *Verily, verily, I ſay unto you, except a man be born again, he cannot ſee the kingdom of God*. This difficulty indeed is greateſt at firſt, but it is conſiderable afterwards, till a thorough change be made, and new inclinations planted in us, and the contrary habits of grace and virtue be ſuperinduced.

And that which increaſeth the difficulty is outward temptation and oppoſition from the world, and the devil; which to withſtand and reſiſt, requires great courage and reſolution, great watchfulneſs and guard over ourſelves. But yet for our comfort, theſe difficulties are not inſuperable to that grace and aſſiſtance which God is always ready to afford to us upon ſo good an occaſion, and to ſo good a purpoſe; *greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world*. And this, I am ſure, is matter of great encouragement to us, that though the difficulty of *working out our ſalvation* be great, yet if we do in good earneſt ſet about it, God is ready to aſſiſt and ſecond our ſincere endeavours, *to work in us both to will and to do of his own goodneſs*, and ſo to prevent us with his gracious favour, and to further us with his continual aid, that finally by his mercy we may obtain eternal life.

Thirdly, Another powerful argument to care and diligence, is the fatal danger of miſcarriage in a mat-

ter of ſo great concernment. We may do many things in religion, and take ſome pains to get to heaven, and yet fall ſhort of it. The rich young man in the goſpel, our Saviour tells us, was *not far from the kingdom of God*, and he broke with our Saviour only upon one point, he was too much addicted to the world, and loth to part with his great poſſeſſions, and diſtribute them in charity to the poor, and thereupon he left our Saviour, and, for any thing we can find, never returned to him again.

If the world govern and bear ſway in our hearts, if we *mind earthly things* firſt, and make theſe our chief care and deſign, *the kingdom of God and his righteouſneſs* ſhall not *be added unto us*; if we will not mind them in the firſt place, they are too good to be acceſſaries.

And if upon any one point we miſcarry, either out of love to the world, or affection to any other luſt or vice that we are loth to part withal, our miſcarriage is fatal, and the ruin which we bring upon ourſelves irreparable; for the ſoul once loſt, is loſt for ever. If we have neglected the opportunity of *working out our own ſalvation*, while we are in this world, it will never return into our power again; death will ſhut the door againſt us, and we ſhall never *ſee the kingdom of God*.

Fourthly, It is a mighty encouragement to us to conſider, that if we ſincerely *ſeek the kingdom of God and his righteouſneſs*, there is not only a fair probability of obtaining them, but all the ſecurity we can deſire. Men may be in good earneſt for the things of this world, may love them with all their hearts and ſouls (as we ſee too many do) and ſeek them with all their might and ſtrength, and yet after all, their endeavours may be ſhamefully fruſtrated and diſappointed of their end. There are many examples of this kind daily before our eyes, and yet men are not diſcouraged from ſeeking theſe things. A fair probability, nay, almoſt a poſſibility of attaining them, is enough to a worldly-minded man to drudge and toil for them. Why? the ſame affection, the ſame zeal, the ſame unwearied endea-

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vour to pleaſe God, and to ſave our ſouls, would infallibly bring us to heaven. It was a ſad, but true ſaying of Cardinal Wolſey, when he was leaving the world, "Had I been but as careful to pleaſe God, "as I have been to ſerve my prince, he would not "have forſaken me now in the time of my grey "hairs."

Nay, it is to be hoped, that leſs diligence and care about the concernments of our ſouls, and another life, than many men uſe about the things of this life, will ſecure our eternal happineſs, or elſe it is to be feared, that but very few would be ſaved: And who would not place his induſtry and endeavour upon a deſign in which he is ſure not to miſcarry, if he do but heartily and in good earneſt purſue it? eſpecially when it will be of infinite greater advantage to him, than any deſign he can propound to himſelf for this world. If a man may be certainly happy for ever, upon the ſame, or eaſier terms, than he can ordinarily compaſs any of thoſe little deſigns which men propoſe to themſelves in this world; who would not ſeek that which is moſt worthy the having, and which he is ſureſt to obtain?

Fifthly and *laſtly*, The encouragement here in the text is not inconſiderable; that if we *ſeek the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs, all theſe things ſhall be added unto us.* This certainly is a very tempting conſideration; for who would not be glad to reconcile the enjoyment of this world with the hopes of heaven and eternal happineſs? But men do not generally like our Saviour's method, they would ſeek the things of this world in the firſt place, and get to heaven at laſt; they would be content to ſeek the one, and have the other caſt in and conferred upon them, without their ſeeking. But this will not be granted, this way will not do. And yet our Saviour has gone as far as one would think could in reaſon be deſired; he hath promiſed that if we will make religion, and the ſalvation of our ſouls, our firſt and chief care, that *all theſe things ſhall be added unto us.* So that the deſign of going to heaven, and being happy for ever is no ways inconſiſtent with a com-

petent portion of the things of this life. *Godlineſs* (the Apoſtle tells us) *hath the promiſe of this life, and of that which is to come.* The buſineſs of religion, the practice of a holy and virtuous life, is no hindrance to a man's thriving in his temporal eſtate; nay, in many reſpects it is apt to promote and advance it; by engaging us to diligence in our calling, and by deriving the bleſſing of God upon our honeſt and lawful endeavours; by obliging us to the ſtrict and conſtant practice of truth, and juſtice, and fidelity in all our dealings and commerce, which are the beſt way to eſtabliſh a clear and ſolid reputation, and good eſteem among men; which is an unſpeakable advantage in buſineſs, and, at the long run, one of the beſt and moſt laſting inſtruments of proſperity and ſucceſs.

Beſides, that religion frees a man from thoſe paſſions and vices, which do naturally tend to diſſipate and ruin mens eſtates; as intemperance and lewdneſs, which are every way chargeable vices, and do not only take men off from buſineſs, and render them unfit for it, but waſte their eſtates, and bring many other inconveniencies upon their perſons and families. Religion makes men meek, and peaceable, and inoffenſive in word and deed, which is a great ſecurity againſt chargeable ſuits and contentions, and all ſorts of injuries and affronts from others. Among all the beatitudes of our Saviour, he only promiſeth temporal happineſs to meekneſs, *bleſſed are the meek, for they ſhall inherit the earth.* They who provoke and offend no body, are likely to be leaſt diſturbed and diſquieted by others in their poſſeſſions and enjoyments; *Who will harm you,* (ſaith the Apoſtle, 1 Pet. iii. 13.) *if ye be followers of that which is good?* Some may be ſo perverſe as to perſecute a man for his goodneſs; but it rarely happens; moſt men have not only a kindneſs, but a veneration for true goodneſs.

By all theſe ways religion naturally tends to the temporal proſperity of men, and the promoting of their welfare and happineſs even in this world; beſides that the providence of God is very peculiarly con-

concerned for good men, and a ſpecial bleſſing attends them in all their undertakings. So that excepting the caſe of perſecution (which God will particularly conſider and reward in another world) the religious and good man, who ſincerely ſeeks *the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs*, ſtands as fair, and is upon as good terms, for all the lawful enjoyments of this world, as he that makes it his only deſign to be rich and great in this world; nay, as to the neceſſaries of this life, and a competency of outward things, he hath a much greater and better ſecurity from the providence and promiſe of God, than the men of the world have by all their care and pains.

Beſides, that he hath this conſiderable advantage, by minding theſe things only as acceſſaries, that if he miſs of them, he hath ſomething better to ſupport him in the want of them; being ſecure of a happineſs which this world can neither give nor take from him. But now the worldly man, if he be defeated in his deſigns, is of all men moſt miſerable, becauſe he hath nothing elſe to comfort him, nothing elſe to truſt to; he fails of his hopes as to this world, and hath done what in him lies to make his caſe deſperate as to the other.

Upon all theſe conſiderations and encouragements, you ſee how reaſonable it is, that we ſhould make religion, and the concernments of another life, our great care and buſineſs. And yet how are theſe neglected by the greateſt part of mankind! and by the beſt of us (God knows) not minded as they ought, and as they deſerve! What can we ſay for ourſelves in excuſe of ſo intolerable a folly? There are two or three things which men commonly pretend, if not in juſtification, yet in mitigation and excuſe of this great neglect.

Firſt, They pretend great difficulties and diſcouragements in the ways of religion. This I have already acknowledged to be true, ſo far as to awaken our care, and to whet our induſtry; but by no means to make us deſpond and give over all care of ſo great a concernment, becauſe of the difficulties it is attended withal. Men who have no mind to a thing,

are apt to imagine great difficulties in the attaining of it, and to magnify them in their fancies beyond reason. As the people of Israel, when they were to enter into Canaan (which was the type of the kingdom of heaven) represented the inhabitants of the land, whom they were to conquer, more terrible than in truth they were; reporting to one another, that the land was full of giants, and sons of Anak, men of prodigious stature, and cities walled up to heaven. And this the wise man observes to be the perpetual excuse of the slothful; when they have no mind to a thing, they say, *there is a lion in the way*; that is, they fancy to themselves dangers and terrors which are not. Thus men who are averse from religion, and have no mind to be at the trouble and pains to get to heaven, are apt to complain of the monstrous and insuperable difficulties of religion, and how hard it is for a man to mortify his lusts, and subdue his appetites, and govern his passions, and to do all those things, which are necessary to bring him to heaven. Well! it is acknowledged to be difficult: and is it not so to get an estate, and to rise to any thing in this world? The true pains which men take about these things, shew that they are difficult; only when men have a mind to a thing, and their heart is set upon it, they do not stand to complain of the difficulty, but buckle to it, and grapple with it.

Is religion difficult? And what is not so, that is good for any thing? Is not the law a difficult and crabbed study? Does it not require great labour, and perpetual drudging to excel in any kind of knowledge, to be master of any art or profession? In a word, is there any thing in the world worthy the having, that is to be gotten without pains? And is eternal life and glory the only slight and inconsiderable thing, that is not worth our care and industry? Is it fit that so great a good should be exposed to the faint and idle wishes, to the cheap and lazy endeavours of slothful men? For what reason? Nay, with what conscience can we bid less for heaven and eternal life, than men are contented to give for the things of this world; things of no value in comparison

riſon, not worthy the toiling for, not ſure to be attained by all our endeavours; things which *periſh in the uſing*, and which, when we have them, we are liable to be deprived of by a thouſand accidents? One fit of a fever may ſhatter our underſtandings, and confound all our knowledge, and turn us into fools and idiots; an inundation or a fire may ſweep away and devour our eſtates; a ſucceſſion of calamities may in a few hours make the richeſt and greateſt man as poor as Job, and ſet him upon a dunghill.

But be the difficulty what it will of attaining *the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs*, they are to be ſought at any rate; becauſe they are abſolutely neceſſary, and we miſerable and undone if we have them not. And therefore, not to diſſemble in the matter, the difficulties of religion are conſiderable; but then they are much greater at firſt, and will every day abate and grow leſs, and the work by degrees will become eaſy, and turn into pleaſure and delight; a pleaſure ſo great, as none knows but he that hath it; and he that hath it, would not exchange it for all the ſenſual pleaſures and enjoyments of this world.

Secondly, Others pretend want of time for the minding of ſo great a work. And it is very true, that all perſons have not equal leiſure for this purpoſe; ſome are much more ſtraitened than others, and more taken up with the neceſſary cares of this life: But God hath put no man upon this hard neceſſity, that for want of time he ſhall be forced to neglect his body and his health, his family and eſtate, to ſave his ſoul. And yet if any man were brought to this diſtreſs, it were well worth his while to ſecure his eternal ſalvation, though it were with the neglect and loſs of all other things. But thoſe who are moſt ſtraitened for time, have ſo much as is abſolutely neceſſary: for there is a conſiderable part of religion which does not require time, but reſolution and care: Not to commit ſin, not to break the laws of God, not to be intemperate, *to make no proviſion for the fleſh, to fulfill the luſts thereof*, does not

ſpend

ſpend time, but ſaves it for better purpoſes; ſo that every man hath time not to do that which he ought not to do: And for the poſitive part of religion, whether it conſiſts in the exercise of our minds, or in the external acts of religion: no man is ſo diſtreſſed but he hath time to think of heaven, and eternity; time to love God, to eſteem him, and delight in him above all things. And this a man may do very frequently, and very acceptably, while he is labouring and travelling about his worldly affairs, while his hand is upon the plough, his heart may be with God; and while he converſeth here upon earth, his thoughts and affections may be in heaven. Every man hath time to pray to God every day, for his mercy and forgiveneſs, for his grace and aſſiſtance, for his preſervation and ſupport, and to thank him heartily for all his bleſſings and benefits. And a little time ſeriouſly employed in this kind, would have the ſame acceptance with God, as the more ſolemn and longer devotions of thoſe who have more leiſure and opportunities for them. To be ſure, we have all of us time to ſerve God upon his own day, and to employ it wholly in the exercises of piety, and in the care and conſideration of our ſouls.

But this, when all is ſaid, is the caſe but of very few; moſt of us have no colour for this complaint; *non inopes temporis, ſed prodigi ſumus*, (as Seneca ſays) "we are not poor, but prodigal of our time, and "laviſh it away profuſely upon folly and vanity." Our vices and luſts, our pleaſures and diverſions, conſume and divert thoſe precious hours, which ſhould be employed to theſe better purpoſes; nay, many times time oppreſſeth us, and is a burden to us, and lies upon our hands, and we know not how to get rid of it; and yet we chuſe rather to let it run waſte, than to beſtow it upon religion, and the care of our ſouls; inſomuch that I fear this will be the condition of many, that when they were at a loſs what to do with their time, and knew not how to ſpend it, they would not lay it out upon that which was beſt and moſt neceſſary; for this ſurely is the very

very beſt uſe that can be made of time, to prepare and provide for eternity.

Thirdly, Others pretend it will be time enough to mind theſe things hereafter. But this (as bad excuſes ſeldom hang together, and agree with one another) directly contradicts the former pretence, which ſuppoſeth ſo much time neceſſary, and more than many have to ſpare; and yet now they would make us believe that a very little time will ſuffice for this work, and that it may be done at any time, even juſt when we are going out of this world. But this, of all other is the ſtrangeſt interpretation of *ſeeking the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs firſt*, to put it off to the very laſt. This ſurely is a greater error on the other hand, to think that the buſineſs of religion is ſo quickly to be diſpatched, and that the great work of our lives can be crowded into ſo narrow a corner of it, that the time of ſickneſs and old age, nay, the hour of death, well employed to this purpoſe, will be ſufficient. Alas! what can we then do that is good for any thing? that can in reaſon be thought either acceptable to God, or available for ourſelves? When we have not ſenſe and underſtanding enough to diſpoſe of our temporal concernments, and to make our wills, do we think we ſhall be fit to repent of the ſins and miſcarriages of our whole lives, and to make our peace with God? Every man muſt not expect to have Saul's fortune, who when he was wearied with ſeeking his father's aſſes, met with a kingdom. We muſt not think when we are tired with purſuing the follies and vanities of this world, to retire into heaven, and to *ſit down with Abraham, Iſaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God.*

Our Saviour hath taken care to caution us againſt this deſperate folly, by a parable to this very purpoſe, of the *fooliſh virgins*, who having trifled away their time till the bridegroom was coming, and neglected to get *oil into their lamps*, (by which we are to underſtand all thoſe good preparations and diſpoſitions which are neceſſary to qualify us for the kingdom of God) I ſay, having neglected their opportunity

nity of getting this *oil,* while they were looking after it too late, the door was ſhut againſt them; they thought to have repaired all at laſt, by borrowing of others, and ſupplying themſelves that way.

And thus many deceive themſelves, hoping to be ſupplied out of another ſtore, when they have no grace and goodneſs of their own; out of the treaſure of the church, from the redundant merit of the ſaints, and the works of ſupererogation; of which ſome believe (I know not for what reaſon) that there is a great ſtock which the Pope may diſpoſe of, to ſupply thoſe who have taken no care to get *oil into their Lamps.* But I know not for what reaſon works of ſupererogation are ſuppoſed; the wiſe virgins knew not of any merit they had to ſpare, it was the fooliſh virgins only that entertained this ſenſeleſs conceit. I am ſure the parable inſinuates the quite contrary, that the beſt and holieſt perſons (which are repreſented by the wiſe virgins) have nothing to ſpare for the ſupply of others, who have been careleſs of their ſouls; *the fooliſh ſaid unto the wiſe, give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out; but the wiſe anſwered, ſaying, not ſo, leſt there be not enough for us and you, but go ye rather to them that ſell, and buy for yourſelves.* It ſeems they had no works of ſupererogation that they knew of, but they do ironically ſend them to a market that was ſet up ſomewhere, and where theſe things were pretended to be ſold; but how they ſped, the concluſion of the parable tells us, that whilſt they were running about in great haſte to make this purchaſe of the merits and good works of others, *the bridegroom came,* and the wiſe virgins that were ready went in with him to the marriage, and the reſt were ſhut out.

And there are thoſe likewiſe among ourſelves, who having been careleſs to qualify themſelves for *the kingdom of God,* hope to be ſupplied out of the infinite treaſure of Chriſt's merits: But this alſo is a vain hope. For though there be merit enough in the death and ſufferings of Chriſt to ſave all mankind, yet no man can lay claim thereto, who does not perform the conditions of the goſpel.

Others

Others think, by ſending for the miniſter, when the phyſician hath given them over, to receive in a few hours ſuch advice and direction, as will do their buſineſs as effectually, as if they had minded religion all their lives long; and that a few devout prayers ſaid over them, when they are juſt embarking for another world, will, like a magical wind, immediately waft them over into the regions of bliſs and immortality.

But let us not deceive ourſelves; we may defer the buſineſs ſo long, till we ſhall get nothing by our late application to God, and crying to him, *Lord, Lord, open unto us*, but that ſevere anſwer, *Depart from me ye workers of iniquity, I know you not whence ye are.* If we would not have this our doom, let us *firſt ſeek the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs*, that ſo *having our fruit unto holineſs, our end may be everlaſting life.*

SERMON XCVI.

The wiſdom of religion.

PSAL. cxix. 96.

I have ſeen an end of all perfection; but thy commandment is exceeding broad.

THis Pſalm ſeems to have a great deal more of poetical number and skill in it, than at this diſtance from the time and age in which it was written, we can eaſily underſtand: the main ſcope and deſign of it is very plain and obvious; namely, to magnify the law of God, and the obſervation of its precepts, as that wherein true religion doth mainly conſiſt. And indeed, if we attentively read and conſider it, every part of this Pſalm does with great variety of expreſſion, and yet very little difference of the ſenſe, diſcant upon the ſame ground, *viz.* the excellency and perfection of the law of God. And

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the words of the text ſeem to be as full and comprehenſive of the ſenſe and deſign of the whole Pſalm, as any one ſentence in it; *I have ſeen an end of all perfection; but thy commandment is exceeding broad.*

Theſe words are variouſly rendered, and underſtood by interpreters, who yet in this variety do very much conſpire and agree in the ſame ſenſe. The Chaldee paraphraſe renders the words thus, *I have ſeen an end of all things, about which I have employed my care; but thy commandment is very large.* The Syriac verſion thus, *I have ſeen an end of all regions and countries,* (that is, I have found the compaſs of this habitable world to be finite and limited) *but thy commandment is of a vaſt extent.* Others explain it thus, *I have ſeen an end of all perfection,* that is, of all the things of this world, which men value and eſteem at ſo high a rate; of all worldly wiſdom and knowledge, of wealth and honour, and greatneſs, which do all periſh and paſs away; *but thy law is eternal, and ſtill abideth the ſame;* or, as the ſcripture elſewhere expreſſeth it, *the word of the Lord endureth for ever.*

Thy law; that is, the rule of our duty natural and revealed; or, in a word, religion, which conſiſts in the knowledge and practice of the laws of God, is of greater perfection than all other things which are ſo highly valued in this world: for the perfection of it is infinite, and of a vaſt influence and extent; it reacheth to the whole man, to the happineſs of body and ſoul; to our whole duration both in this world, and the next; of this life, and of that which is to come. And this will clearly appear, if we conſider the reaſonableneſs and the wiſdom of religion, which conſiſts in the knowledge of God, and the keeping of his laws.

Firſt, The reaſonableneſs of religion, which is able to give a very good account of itſelf, becauſe it ſettles the mind of man upon a firm baſis, and keeps it from rolling in perpetual uncertainty; whereas atheiſm and infidelity wants a ſtable foundation, it centers no where but in the denial of God and religion, and yet ſub-

ſubſtitutes no principle, no tenable and conſtituent ſcheme of things in the place of them; its whole buſineſs is to unravel all things, to unſettle the mind of man, and to ſhake all the common notions and received principles of mankind; it bends its whole force to pull down and to deſtroy, but lays no foundation to build any thing upon, in the ſtead of that which it pulls down.

It runs upon that great abſurdity which Ariſtotle (who was always thought a great maſter of reaſon) does every where decry, as a principle unworthy of a philoſopher; namely, a progreſs of cauſes *in infinitum*, and without end; that this was the cauſe of that, and a third thing of that, and ſo on without end, which amounts to juſt nothing; and finally reſolves an infinite number of effects into no firſt cauſe; than which nothing can be more unskiful and bungling, and leſs worthy of a philoſopher. But this I do not intend at preſent to inſiſt upon, having treated largely on the ſame ſubject upon another * occaſion. I ſhall therefore proceed in the

Second place, to conſider the wiſdom of religion. *The fear of the Lord is wiſdom*, ſo ſaith the Pſalmiſt; it is true wiſdom indeed, it is the beginning of wiſdom, *caput ſapientiæ*, the top and perfection of all wiſdom. Here true wiſdom begins, and upon this foundation it is raiſed and carried on to perfection; and I ſhall in my following diſcourſe endeavour to make out theſe two things.

Firſt, That true wiſdom begins and is founded in religion, in the fear of God, and in the keeping of his commandments.

Secondly, That this is the perfection of wiſdom; there is no wiſdom without this, nor beyond it.

Firſt, True wiſdom begins and is founded in religion, and the fear of God, and regard to his laws. This is the firſt principle of wiſdom, and the foundation upon which the whole deſign of our happineſs is to be built. This is in the firſt place to be ſuppoſed, and to be taken into conſideration in all the deſigns and actions of men: This is to govern our whole

* *Vide* Ser. I. of the firſt Vol. publiſhed by the author.

whole life, and to have a main influence upon all the affairs and concernments of it. As the firſt principle of human ſociety, and that which is to run through the whole frame of it, is the publick good; this was always to be taken into conſideration, and to give law to all laws and conſtitutions about it: So religion is the firſt principle of human wiſdom, by which all our actions are to be conducted and governed; and all wiſdom, which does not begin here, and lay religion for its foundation, is prepoſterous, and begins at the wrong end; and is juſt as if in the forming of human ſociety, every one in the ſettlement of the conſtitution, and the framing of laws, ſhould have an eye to his own private and particular advantage, without regard to the publick good, which is the great end of ſociety, and the rule and meaſure of government and laws, and in the laſt iſſue and reſult of things, the only way to procure the ſettled welfare, and to ſecure the laſting intereſts of particular perſons, ſo far as that is conſiſtent with the publick good. And it would be a very prepoſterous policy to go about to found human ſociety upon any other terms, and would certainly end in miſchief and confuſion.

And ſuch is all the wiſdom of men, in relation to their true happineſs, which does not begin with religion, and lay its foundation there: Which does not take into conſideration God and his providence, and a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments after this life. All wiſdom which does not proceed upon a ſuppoſition of the truth and reality of theſe principles, will certainly end in ſhame and diſappointment, in miſery and ruin; becauſe it builds a houſe upon the ſand, which when it comes to be tried by ſtreſs of weather, and aſſaulted by violent ſtorms, will undoubtedly fall, and the fall of it will be great.

And this error every man commits, who purſues happineſs by following his own inclination, and gratifying his irregular deſires, without any conſideration of God, and of the reſtraint which his laws have laid upon us, not for his own pleaſure, but for our good. For when all things are duly conſidered, and

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all accounts caſt up, it will appear upon a juſt calculation of things, that all the reſtraints which the laws of God lay upon men, are highly reaſonable, and greatly for their benefit and advantage, and do not abridge us of any true pleaſure or happineſs, but are wiſe and merciful proviſions of heaven, to prevent our harm and miſchief; ſo that we are not wiſe, if we act without regard to God, and his laws, and are not willing to be governed by him, who loves us better than we do ourſelves, and truly deſigns our happineſs, and commands us nothing but what directly tends to it. For the laws of God are not arbitrary conſtitutions, and mere inſtances of ſovereign will and power; but wiſe rules and means to procure and advance our happineſs.

And in like manner, all that wiſdom which men uſe to compaſs their worldly deſigns, of riches and greatneſs, without conſideration of the providence of God, and dependence upon it for the ſucceſs of our affairs, is all perfect folly and miſtake. For though the deſign be never ſo well laid, and vigorouſly proſecuted, and no means which human wiſdom can deviſe for the attaining of our end, have been omitted by us; yet if we leave God out of the account, we forget that which is principal, and ſignifies more to the ſucceſs of any deſign, than all other things put together. For if God favours our deſigns, the moſt improbable ſhall take effect; and if he blow upon them, the moſt likely ſhall miſcarry. Whenever he pleaſeth to interpoſe to croſs the counſels and deſigns of men, *the race is not to the ſwift, nor the battle to the ſtrong; neither yet bread to the wiſe, nor riches to men of underſtanding, nor favour to men of ſkill; but time and chance happens to all.*

So that it is great folly not to conſider the providence of God in all our deſigns and undertakings, not to implore his favour and bleſſing, without which nothing that we take in hand can proſper. That which is principal to any purpoſe, ought to be conſidered in the firſt place, nothing being to be attempted either without, or againſt it. And ſuch is the providence of God in all human affairs; it is more

conſiderable to the promoting or hindering of any event, than all things in the world beſides; and therefore all policy, which ſets aſide God and his providence, is vain; becauſe *there is no wiſdom, nor underſtanding, nor counſel againſt the Lord.*

So likewiſe all that wiſdom which only conſiders and regards this ſhort life, and the narrow concernments of it, and makes proviſion only for our welfare in this world; and therefore can only be tempted with the hopes of temporal advantages, and terrified only with the danger of temporal evils and ſufferings; but hath no ſenſe of an immortal ſpirit within us, no proſpect of a life after death, no conſideration of a happy or miſerable eternity, of rewards and puniſhments, infinitely greater than all the temptations and terrors of time and ſenſe; I ſay, all this is a prepoſterous and pernicious wiſdom, and proceeds upon a falſe ſuppoſition, and a quite contrary ſcheme of things to what really is; and conſequently our whole life, and all the deſigns and actions of it, do run upon a perpetual miſtake, and a falſe ſtating of our own caſe; and whatever we do purſuant to this miſtake is fooliſh and hurtful, and ſo far from conducing to our true intereſt, that it is all either beſide it, or contrary to it; becauſe we act upon a ſuppoſal only of this life, and a being only in this world, and that there is nothing either to be feared or hoped for beyond it; and being thus groſly miſtaken, we ſet our hearts only upon temporal things, and ſtudy our preſent ſecurity and ſatisfaction, and in all our counſels and actions are ſwayed only by the conſideration of temporal good and evil, of the preſent eaſe and pleaſure, the diſturbance and pain of our fleſhly and ſenſual parts; without any ſenſe of our own immortality, and of that everlaſting ſtate which remains for us in another world.

But there is (my brethren,) moſt certainly, there is another life after this; we are not beaſts, if we do not make ourſelves ſo; and if we dy, we ſhall not dy like them, neither ſhall our laſt end be like theirs. For whatever we may think or wiſh, it will not be in our power to extinguiſh our own beings when

when we have a mind to be rid of them, and to chuſe whether or no we ſhall live for ever.

And if this be a falſe ſcheme of things which we have framed to ourſelves, and proceeded upon (as undoubtedly it is) then our whole life is one great error, and a perpetual miſtake, and we are quite wrong in all that we deſign to do. Our wiſdom hath begun at the wrong end, and we have made a falſe calculation and account of things, and have put our caſe otherwiſe than it is; and the farther we proceed upon this miſtake, our miſcarriage will be ſo much the more fatal in the iſſue. But if our wiſdom begin at the right end, and our caſe be truly ſtated, that God hath put into theſe frail and mortal bodies of ours, immortal ſpirits that ſhall live for ever; and hath ſent us into this world to ſojourn here for a little while, and to be diſciplined and trained up for eternity; and that after a ſhort proof and trial of our obedience, we ſhall be tranſlated into an everlaſting ſtate of unſpeakable happineſs or miſery, according as we have demeaned ourſelves in this world; if we believe this to be truly our caſe, our intereſt is then plainly before us, and we ſee where our happineſs lies, and what remains for us to do, in order to the obtaining of it, and what we are to expect to ſuffer, if we do it not.

Now this foundation being laid, it is evident, that the beſt thing we can do for ourſelves, is to provide for our future ſtate, and to ſecure the everlaſting happineſs of another life. And the beſt way to do that, is to live in obedience to thoſe laws which our maker and our ſovereign hath preſcribed to us; and according to which he will one day ſentence us to eternal rewards or puniſhments.

It is evident likewiſe, that all our ſenſual appetites and deſires are to be bounded by the rules of reaſon and virtue, which are the laws of God; and that no preſent eaſe and pleaſure, trouble and ſuffering, are to be conſidered and regarded by us, in competition with the things which are eternal; and that ſin is of all other the greateſt evil, and moſt miſchievous to our main intereſt, and therefore with all poſſible

care to be avoided; and that the favour of God is to be ſought, and the ſalvation of our ſouls to be provided for, at any pains and expence whatſoever, and even with the hazard and loſs of our deareſt intereſts in this world, yea and of life itſelf.

And now, if this matter hath been rightly ſtated, then religion, and the fear of God, is the firſt principle and foundation of true wiſdom, and that which we are to conſider, and take along with us in all the deſigns and actions of our lives; and all wiſdom which does not begin here, is prepoſterous, and will prove folly in the iſſue.

Secondly, As religion is the beginning of wiſdom, ſo it is the perfection of it, it is the higheſt point of wiſdom in which we can be inſtructed, *The fear of the Lord* (ſays Solomon, Prov. xv. 33.) *is the inſtruction of wiſdom. A good underſtanding* (ſays David, Pſal. cxi. 10.) *have all they that do his commandments.* The practice of religion is the perfection of wiſdom; and he underſtands himſelf beſt, who lives moſt according to the laws of God. And this I might ſhew, by inſtancing in particular virtues, the practice whereof is much wiſer, and every way more for our intereſt, than the contrary vices; but this is too large an argument to engage in, and therefore I ſhall content myſelf at preſent briefly to ſhew, that the chief characters and properties of wiſdom do all meet in religion, and agree to it.

The firſt point of wiſdom is, to underſtand our true intereſt, and to be right in our main end; and in this, religion will beſt inſtruct and direct us. And if we be right in our main end, and true to the intereſt of it, we cannot miſcarry: But if a man miſtake in this, he errs fatally, and his whole life is vanity and folly.

Another property of wiſdom is, to be ſteady and vigorous in the proſecution of our main end; to oblige us hereto, religion gives us the moſt powerful arguments, the glorious happineſs, and the diſmal miſery of another world.

The next point of wiſdom is, to make all things ſtoop and become ſubſervient to our main end. And wherever

wherever religion bears ſway, it will make all other things ſubordinate to the ſalvation of our ſouls, and the intereſt of our everlaſting happineſs; as the men of this world make every thing to ſubmit and give way to their covetous, and ambitious, and ſenſual deſigns.

Another part of wiſdom is, to conſider the future, and to look to the laſt end and iſſue of things. It is a common folly among men, to be ſo intent upon the preſent, as to have little or no regard to the future, to what will be hereafter. Men deſign and labour for this preſent life, and their ſhort continuance here in this world, without taking into ſerious conſideration their main duration, and their eternal abode in another world. But religion gives us a clear proſpect of a life after death, and overlooks time, and makes eternity always preſent to us, and minds us of making timely proviſion and preparation for it. It takes into conſideration our whole duration, and inſpires us with wiſdom, to look to the end of things, and to what will be hereafter, as well as to what is preſent.

It is likewiſe a great property of wiſdom, to ſecure the main chance, and to run no hazard in that. And this religion directs us to take care of, becauſe the neglect of it will prove fatal.

Another mark of wiſdom is, to lay hold of opportunities, thoſe eſpecially, which, when they are once paſt, will never return again. There are ſome ſeaſons wherein great things may be done, which if they be let ſlip, are never to be retrieved. A wiſe man will lay hold of theſe, and improve them; and religion inculcates this principle of wiſdom upon us, that this life is the opportunity of doing great things for ourſelves, and of making ourſelves for even; this very day and hour may, for ought we know, be the laſt and only opportunity of repentance, and making our peace with God: Therefore *to day, whilſt it is called to day*, let us ſet about this neceſſary work, *leſt any of us be hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin*; to-morrow it may be too late to begin it, and the juſtice of God may cut us off whilſt we

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are wilfully delaying it; and the opportunities of saving our immortal souls, may vanish, and be for ever hid from our eyes.

The next property of wisdom is, to foresee dangers, and to take timely care to prevent them. *The prudent man* (saith Solomon) *foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself*; that is, shelters and secures himself against it; *but the simple pass on, and are punished*; that is, the evil overtakes them, and their folly is punished in their fatal ruin. Now the greatest danger is from the greatest power; even from *him who is able to save and to destroy. I will tell you* (says the wisdom of God) *whom ye shall fear; fear him, who after he hath killed, can destroy both body and soul in hell.*

Again, another main point of wisdom is, to do as little as we can to be repented of, trusting rather to the wisdom of prevention, than to that of remedy. Religion first teacheth men innocency, and not to offend; but in case we do, (as *in many things we offend all*) it then directs us to repentance, as the only remedy. But this certainly is folly, to sin in hopes of repentance, that is, first to make work for repentance, and then run the hazard of it; for we may certainly sin; but it is not certain that we shall repent. And if it were, yet it is great folly to lay in before-hand, and to make work for trouble; *ne tu stultus homuncio es, qui malis veniam precari, quam non peccare*, was a wise saying of old *Cato*; *thou art* (says he) *a silly man indeed, who chusest rather to ask forgiveness, than not to offend.* If a man had the best remedy in the world, he would not make himself sick to try the virtue of it, and it is a known comparison, and a very fit one, that repentance is *tabula post naufragium*, *a plank after shipwreck.* But I am greatly afraid that thousands of souls, who have trusted to it, have perished before they could get to land, with this plank in their arms.

The last character of wisdom I shall mention is, in all things to consult the peace and satisfaction of our own minds, without which nothing else can make us happy; and this obedience to the laws of God does natural-

naturally procure. *Great peace have they* (ſays David) *that love thy law, and nothing ſhall offend them. The work of righteouſneſs*, ſays the prophet, *ſhall be peace, and the effect of righteouſneſs, quietneſs, and aſſurance for ever.* The fear of God, and the keeping of his commandments, is the beſt preſervative againſt the troubles of a guilty conſcience, and the terrifying apprehenſions of a future judgment. And this is the great wiſdom of religion, that whoſoever liveth according to the rules and precepts of it, prevents the chief cauſes of diſcontent, and lays the ſureſt foundation of a perpetual ſatisfaction of mind, a jewel of ineſtimable price, which none knows but he that has it, and he that hath it, knows the value of it too well to part with it for *the pleaſures of ſin, which are but for a ſeaſon*, and which always prove *bitterneſs in the end*, and for the little ſweetneſs which they yielded, leave a terrible ſting behind them.

Thus have I briefly repreſented the reaſonableneſs and wiſdom of religion. It is of infinite perfection, and of a vaſt influence and extent, it reacheth to the whole man, the happineſs of ſoul and body; and to our whole duration, the happineſs of this world and the next; for *godlineſs* (that is, true religion and piety) *hath the promiſe of this life, and of that which is to come.*

But now where are the effects of true religion, in the full compaſs and extent of it, to be found? ſuch real effects as do in any meaſure bear a proportion to the power and perfection of their cauſe? for nothing certainly is more excellent and amiable in its definition than true religion is; but alas! how imperfect is it in the ſubject? I mean in us, who ought to ſhew forth the power and perfection of it, in the practice and actions of our lives, the beſt demonſtration of the excellent frame and temper of our minds.

What a conflict and ſtruggling do the beſt men find between their inclination and their duty? how hard to reconcile our practice and our knowledge, and to make our lives to agree with the reaſon of our minds

minds, and the clear conviction of our consciences? how difficult for a man in this dangerous and imperfect state, to be in any measure either so wise or good as he ought? how rare is it for man to be good natured, gentle, and easy to be intreated, without being often betrayed into some weakness and sinful compliances, especially in the bad company of our betters? how next to impossible is it to be strict and severe in our lives, without being sour? to govern our lives with that perpetual caution, and to maintain that evenness of temper, as not to be sometimes peevish and passionate? and when we are so, not to be apt to say with Jonah, *we do well to be angry.*

There are two precepts in the New Testament, that seem to me to be the nicest of all other, and hardest to be put in practice. One is that of our blessed Saviour, *be wise as serpents, and innocent as doves.* How hard is it to hit upon the just temper of wisdom and innocency; to be wise, and hurt no body; to be innocent, without being silly? The other is that of the Apostle, *be angry and sin not.* How difficult is this, never to be angry but upon just cause? and when the cause of our anger is just, not to be transported beyond due bounds, either as to the degree of our anger, or as to the duration and continuance of it? this is so very nice a matter, that one would be almost tempted to think that this were in effect a prohibition of anger in any case; *be ye angry, and sin not;* be ye so, if ye can without sin. I believe, whosoever observes it, will find that it is as easy to suppress this passion at at any time, as to give way to it, without offending in one kind, or other. But to proceed,

How hard a matter is it, to be much in company, and free in conversation, and not to be infected by it? to live in the midst of a wicked world, and yet to keep ourselves free from the vices of it? to be temperate in the use of things pleasing, so as neither to injure our health, nor to lose the use of our reason, nor to offend against conscience? to fast often, without being conceited of it, and bargaining as it were

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with God for ſome greater liberties in another kind; and without cenſuring thoſe who do not tie up themſelves to our ſtrict rules either of piety or abſtinence? when perhaps they have neither the ſame opportunities of doing it, nor the ſame reaſon to do it that we have; nay, perhaps have a much better reaſon for not doing juſt as we do: for no man is to preſcribe to others his own private method, either of faſting, or of devotion, as if he were the rule, and his example a kind of proclamation, enjoining all his neighbours the ſame days of faſting and prayer which he himſelf, for reaſons beſt known to himſelf, thinks fit to obſerve.

And then how hard is it to be chearful without being vain? and grave and ſerious without being moroſe? to be uſeful and inſtructive to others in our converſation and diſcourſe, without aſſuming too much authority to ourſelves? which is not the beſt and moſt effectual way of doing good to others; there being ſomething in the nature of man, which had rather take a hint and intimation from another, to adviſe himſelf, and would rather chuſe to imitate the ſilent good example which they ſee in another, than to have either his advice or his example impoſed upon them.

How difficult is it to have a mind equal to every condition, and to be content with mean and moderate things? to be patient in adverſity, and humble in proſperity, and meek upon ſudden and violent provocations? to keep our paſſions free from getting head of our reaſon, and our zeal from out-running our knowledge? to have a will perfectly ſubmitted and reſigned to the will of God, even when it lies croſs and thwart to ours, ſo that whatever pleaſes God ſhould pleaſe us? to be reſolute, when our duty happens to be difficult and dangerous; or even to believe that to be our duty (though it certainly be ſo) which is very inconvenient for us to do? to hold out and be unwearied in well-doing? to be careful to preſerve our lives, and yet upon a great occaſion, and whenever God calls for them, to be content to lay them down.

To be wise and innocent; *men in understanding*, and yet *in malice children?*" to have many great virtues, and not to want that which gives the great lustre to them all, I mean real, and unaffected modesty and humility? In short,

How difficult is it, *to have regard to all God's commandments*, and *to hate every evil and false way?* to have our duty continually in our eye, and ready to be put into practice upon every proper occasion? to have God, and the consideration of another world always before us, present to our minds, and operative upon our practice? to live as those that know they must dy, and to have our thoughts perpetually awake, and intent upon the great and everlasting concernments of our immortal souls?

These are great things indeed, easy to be talked of, but hard to be done; nay, not to be done at all, without frequent and fervent prayer to God, and the continual aids and supplies of his grace; not without an earnest endeavour on our parts, a vigorous resistance of temptations, and many a sore conflict with our own perverse wills and sensual inclinations; not without a perpetual guard and watchfulness over our lives, and our unruly appetites and passions.

Little do unexperienced men, and those who have taken no great pains with themselves, imagine what thought and consideration, what care and attention, what resolution and firmness of mind, what diligence and *patient continuance in well-doing*, are requisite to make a truly good man; such a one as St. Paul describes, that is, *perfect and entire, and wanting nothing*; that follows God fully, and fulfils every part of his duty, *having a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man.* Who is there among us, that is either wise enough for his own direction, or good enough for the peace and satisfaction of his own mind; that is so happy as to know his duty, and to do it; as to have both the understanding and the will to do in all things as he ought?

After our best care, and all our pains and endeavours, the most of us will still find a great many defects in our lives, and cannot but discern great and manifold

manifold imperfections in our very beſt duties and ſervices; inſomuch that we ſhall be forced to make the ſame acknowledgment concerning them, which Solomon does concerning the imperfection of all things under the ſun; *that which is crooked cannot be made ſtraight, and that which is wanting cannot be numbred.* And when all is done, we have all of us reaſon to ſay, not only that *we are unprofitable ſervants, having done nothing but what was our duty to do*; but have cauſe likewiſe, with great ſhame and confuſion of face, to acknowledge that we have been in many reſpects *wicked and ſlothful ſervants*, and ſo very far from having done what was our duty to do, that the greateſt part of the good which the moſt of us have done, is the leaſt part of the good which we might and ought to have done.

The practice of religion, in all the parts and inſtances of our duty, is work more than enough for the beſt and greateſt mind, for the longeſt and beſt ordered life, *the commandment of God is exceeding broad*; and an obedience in any good meaſure equal to the extent of it, extremely difficult. And after all, as the man in the goſpel ſaid with tears to our Saviour, concerning the weakneſs of his own faith, *Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief*, Mark ix. 24. So the beſt of men may ſay, and ſay it with tears too, concerning every grace and virtue wherein they excel moſt, "Lord, I aſpire, I endeavour after it, "be thou pleaſed to aſſiſt my weakneſs, and to help "me by thy grace continually to do better."

The ſum of all is this, If we be careful to do our beſt, and make it the conſtant and ſincere endeavour of our lives to pleaſe God, and to keep his commandments, we ſhall be accepted of him; for God values this more than *whole burnt offerings and ſacrifices*, more than *thouſands of rams, and ten thouſands of rivers of oil*; becauſe this is an eſſential part of religion, *To love God with all our hearts and minds, and ſtrength, and to love our neighbours as ourſelves.* The duties comprehended in theſe two great commandments, ſincerely practiſed by us (though with a great deal of imperfection) will certainly be acceptable

in the ſight of God, in and through the merits and mediation of *Jeſus Chriſt the righteous. Bleſſed are they* (ſaith St. John very plainly, in the concluſion of that obſcure book of his revelation) *Bleſſed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life,* Rev. xxii. 14.

I ſpeak now to a great many who are at the upper end of the world, and command all the pleaſures and enjoyments of it; but the time is coming, and (whether we think of it or not) is very near at hand, when we ſhall *ſee an end of all perfection,* and of all that is deſirable upon earth, and upon which men are apt to value themſelves ſo much in this world; and then nothing but religion, and the conſcience of having done our duty to God and man, will ſtand us in ſtead, and yield true comfort to us. When we are going to leave the world, how ſhall we then wiſh that we had made religion the great buſineſs of our lives; and in the day of God's grace and mercy, had exerciſed repentance, and made our peace with God, and prepared ourſelves for another world; that after our departure hence, we might be admitted into the *preſence of God, where is fulneſs of joy, and at whoſe right hand are pleaſures for evermore!*

Let no man therefore, of what rank or condition ſoever he be in this world, think himſelf too great to be good, and too wiſe to be religious, and to take care of his immortal ſoul, and his everlaſting happineſs in another world; ſince nothing but this will approve itſelf to be true wiſdom at the laſt. All other things will have an end with this life; but religion and the fear of God is of a vaſt extent, and hath an influence upon our whole duration, and, after the courſe of this life is ended, will put us into the ſecure poſſeſſion of a happineſs which ſhall never have an end.

I will conclude this whole diſcourſe with thoſe words of our bleſſed Saviour, *If ye know theſe things, happy are ye if ye do them. Which thou, who art the eternal ſpring of truth and goodneſs, grant that we may all know and do in this our day, for thy mercies*

cies ſake in Jeſus Chriſt; to whom with the Father, and the Holy Ghoſt, be all honour and glory, dominion and power, now and for ever. Amen.

SERMON XCVII.

The nature and influence of the promiſes of the goſpel.

2 PETER i. 4.

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promiſes; that by theſe ye might be partakers of the divine nature.

The firſt ſermon on this text.

THE connexion of theſe words with the former is ſomewhat obſcure, but it ſeems to be this. The Apoſtle had in the verſe before ſaid, *that the divine power of Chriſt hath by the knowledge of the goſpel given us all things that pertain to life and godlineſs*; that is, by the knowledge of the goſpel we are furniſhed with all advantages which conduce to make men happy in the next life, and religious in this; and then it follows, *whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promiſes. Whereby*; this ſeems to refer to the whole of the foregoing verſe; as if it had been ſaid, "Chriſt by "the goſpel hath given to us all things that conduce "to our future happineſs; and in order thereto, all "things which tend to make men holy and good." Or elſe, *life and godlineſs* are, by a Hebraiſm frequent in the New Teſtament, put for a godly life. And then among all thoſe things which conduce to a godly life, the Apoſtle inſtanceth in the promiſes of the goſpel, which do ſo directly tend to make men *partakers of a divine nature.*

In the handling of theſe words, I ſhall,

Firſt, Conſider the promiſes here ſpoken of; *whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promiſes.*

Secondly, The influence which theſe promiſes ought to have upon us; *that by theſe ye might be made partakers of a divine nature.*

Firſt, We will conſider the promiſes which are here ſpoken of; *whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promiſes.* And becauſe the chief promiſes of the goſpel are here intended, I ſhall take occaſion from this text to handle the doctrine of the promiſes, which is frequently diſcourſed of in divinity, but not always ſo clearly ſtated. And to this purpoſe, it will be proper to take into conſideration theſe four things:

I. What the promiſes are which are here ſpoken of; *whereby are given unto us promiſes.*

II. Why they are ſaid to be ſo great and precious; *exceeding great and precious promiſes.*

III. We will conſider the tenor of theſe promiſes.

IV. When men are ſaid to have a right to them, ſo as they may apply them to themſelves. Theſe four heads will comprehend what I have to ſay upon this argument.

I. What the promiſes are which the Apoſtle here ſpeaks of; *whereby are given unto us promiſes.* And, no doubt, the Apoſtle here intends thoſe great and excellent promiſes which Chriſt hath made to us in the goſpel. So that, to ſatisfy ourſelves in this enquiry, we need only to conſider what are the principal promiſes of the goſpel. Now the great promiſes of the goſpel are theſe three:

1. The promiſe of the free pardon and forgiveneſs of our ſins, upon our faith and repentance.

2. The promiſe of God's grace and holy ſpirit to aſſiſt our obedience.

3. The promiſe of eternal life to reward it.

1. The promiſe of the pardon and forgiveneſs of our ſins, upon our faith and repentance. The goſpel hath made full and clear promiſes to this purpoſe; that if we believe the goſpel, and will forſake our ſins, and amend our wicked lives, all that is paſt

ſhall

shall be forgiven us, and that Christ died for this end, to obtain for us remission of sins in his blood. The light of nature, upon consideration of the mercy and goodness of God, gave men good hopes, that upon their repentance God would forgive their sins, and turn away his wrath from them. But mankind was doubtful of this, and therefore they used expiatory sacrifices to appease the offended Deity. The Jewish religion allowed of no expiation, but for legal impurities, and involuntary transgressions, such as proceeded from ignorance and inadvertency; but not for *sins of presumption*, and such as were committed *with an high hand*. If men sinned wilfully, there was no sacrifice appointed by the law for such sins. But the grace of the gospel justifies us from the greatest sins, upon our faith and sincere repentance. So St. Paul tells the Jews, Acts xiii. 38, 39. *Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.* There was no general promise of pardon, nor way of expiation under the law; perfect remission of sins is clearly revealed, and ascertained to us only by the gospel.

2. Another great promise of the gospel is the promise of God's grace, and Holy Spirit, to assist our obedience. Our blessed Saviour hath promised, that *our heavenly father will give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him*. It is true indeed, there was a peculiar promise of the Holy Ghost to the Apostles and Christians of the first ages, which is not now to be expected; namely, an extraordinary and miraculous power, whereby they were qualified to publish the gospel to the world, and to give confirmation to it. But now that the Christian religion is propagated and settled in the world, the great end and use of these miraculous gifts is ceased: But yet the Spirit of God doth still concur with the gospel, and work upon the minds of men, to excite and assist them to that which is good. And though this operation be very secret, so as we cannot give an account of the manner of

it, yet the effects of it are very ſenſible, and this influence of God's Holy Spirit is common to all Chriſtians in all ages of the world. This propoſition is univerſally true, and in all ages and times; *If any man hath not the Spirit of Chriſt, he is none of his.*

It muſt be acknowledged, that the Spirit doth not now work upon men in that ſudden and ſenſible manner, as it did in the firſt times of Chriſtianity: becauſe then men were ſtrongly poſſeſſed with the prejudices of other religions, which they had been brought up in; and therefore as more outward means of conviction were then neceſſary, ſo likewiſe a more powerful internal operation of the Spirit of God upon the minds of men, to conquer and bear down thoſe prejudices, and to ſubdue them to the obedience of faith. But now the principles of religion and goodneſs are more gradually inſtilled into the minds of men, by the gentle degrees of pious inſtruction and education; and with theſe means the Spirit of God concurs in a more human way, which is more ſuited and accommodated to our reaſon, and offers leſs violence to the nature of men. So that this promiſe of God's Holy Spirit is now made good to us, as the neceſſity and circumſtances of our preſent ſtate do require. God does not uſe ſuch extraordinary means for the producing of thoſe effects, which may be accompliſhed in a more ordinary way. The aſſiſtance of God's Holy Spirit is ſtill neceſſary to men, to incline and enable them to that which is good; but not in that manner and degree that it was neceſſary at firſt: Becauſe the prejudices againſt Chriſtianity are not now ſo great, and many of thoſe advantages which were neceſſarily wanting at firſt, are now ſupplied in an ordinary way; and therefore it is not reaſonable now to expect the ſame extraordinary operation of the Spirit of God upon the minds of men, which we read of in the firſt beginnings of Chriſtianity.

3. There is likewiſe the promiſe of eternal life to reward and crown our obedience. And this the ſcripture ſpeaks of as the great promiſe of the goſpel, 1 John ii. 25. *This is the promiſe which he hath pro-*

promiſed us, even eternal life. And upon this account, the new covenant of the goſpel is preferred before the old covenant of the law, becauſe it is *eſtabliſhed upon better promiſes*, All the ſpecial and particular promiſes of the law were of temporal good things, and theſe were the great encouragements that were given to obedience, under that imperfect diſpenſation: But now *godlineſs hath not only the promiſe of the life that now is, but of that which is to come*; as the Apoſtle tells us, 1 Tim. iv. 8. The goſpel hath clearly revealed to us a happy ſtate of immortality after this life, of which men had but very obſcure and doubtful apprehenſions. So the Apoſtle tells us, 2 Tim. 1. 10. *That it is now made manifeſt, by the appearance of our Saviour Jeſus Chriſt, who hath aboliſhed death, and hath brought life and immortality to light, through the goſpel.* Holy men had good hopes of it before; but they had no ſure, diſtinct apprehenſions of it, no ſuch full aſſurance concerning it, no ſuch clear and expreſs promiſes of it, as the goſpel hath given us.

Thus you ſee what thoſe great promiſes are which the goſpel hath given us, namely the promiſe of the free pardon and forgiveneſs of our ſins, upon our faith and repentance; the promiſe of God's grace and Holy Spirit to aſſiſt our obedience, and the promiſe of eternal life and happineſs to reward it. Theſe are the three eminent promiſes of the goſpel, and in all probability thoſe which the Apoſtle here calls *great and precious promiſes*; which brings me to the

II. Thing which I propounded to conſider, namely, why they are ſaid to be *exceeding great and precious*, τὰ μέγιστα καὶ τίμια ἐπαγγέλματα, *the greateſt and the moſt valuable promiſes.* And to ſatisfy us that they are ſuch, the very conſideration of the bleſſings and benefits that they carry in them will be ſufficient. If we conſider the condition that mankind was in, when God was pleaſed to make theſe gracious declarations to us, we ſhall ſee great reaſon to ſet a high value upon every one of theſe promiſes. Mankind was extremely degenerated; *all fleſh had corrupted its ways*, and *the whole world was*

guilty

guilty before God, and liable to all that misery which the sinner had reason to apprehend from the incensed justice of the Almighty. We had forfeited that happiness to which our immortal nature was designed, and, which made our condition more sad, we were *without strength* to recover ourselves out of it, by our repentance for what was past, (if God would have accepted of it) and by our future obedience. Now the promises of the gospel offer relief to us in all these respects, and thereby obviate all the difficulties and discouragements which mankind lay under.

The gracious promise of pardon frees us from guilt, and secures us from the terrible wrath of God, which our guilty consciences did so much dread; and without this promise, mankind would have been under the greatest doubts and discouragements. For when men are afraid *their sins are greater than will be forgiven them*, they are apt to fall into despair, and despair is an effectual bar to repentance; for when men think their condition is desperate, they care not what they do.

And the promise of God's grace and Holy Spirit, to assist and enable us to do our duty, does fully answer all the discouragements and objections from our own weakness, and the power of temptation. We may *do all things through Christ strengthening us*; and how weak soever we are of ourselves, we are *strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might*. If God be for us, who, or what can stand against us? The devil is a very powerful enemy, and much too strong for flesh and blood to encounter in its own strength; but there is another principle in the world, which is mightier and more powerful than he, the Holy Spirit of God, who is always ready to help, when we do not repulse and refuse his assistance; *Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world*, says the Apostle, 1 John iv. 4. The Spirit of God dwells in all those who are willing to admit him, and is ever ready to assist those who comply with his blessed motions, and do vigorously put forth their own endeavours.

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And then the promiſe of eternal life, that anſwers all the difficulties of our obedience, and ſets us above any thing that the world can threaten us withal, for our conſtancy to God, and his truth. A wiſe man will be content to ſuffer any thing, or to quit any thing, upon terms of far greater advantage: And what greater conſideration can be offered to encourage our conſtancy and obedience, than an eternity of happineſs? So that the Apoſtle had reaſon to call theſe *exceeding great and valuable promiſes*; ſo valuable, that if any one of them had been wanting, our redemption and recovery had either been abſolutely impoſſible, or extremely difficult. I proceed to the

III. Thing I propounded, which was to conſider the tenor of theſe promiſes; that is, whether God hath made them abſolutely to us, without requiring any thing to be done on our part, or upon certain terms and conditions to be performed by us. That God may (if he pleaſe) make an abſolute promiſe of any bleſſing or benefit to us, there is no doubt; and that God's grace does prevent many, and is before-hand with them, is as little to be doubted: The Spirit of God goes along with the Goſpel, moving and inclining men to yield obedience to it, many times before any inclination and diſpoſition thereto on their parts. But as to this promiſe of God's grace and Holy Spirit, the great queſtion is not about the firſt motion of it, but the continuance of this aſſiſtance, and the increaſe of it; and this, I think, may ſafely be affirmed, is promiſed only conditionally, as alſo the pardon of ſin, and eternal life. And concerning each of theſe, the matter may quickly be decided, by plain texts of ſcripture:

Concerning the promiſe of the grace and aſſiſtance of God's Holy Spirit, the ſcripture takes notice of two conditions. *Firſt*, that we beg it earneſtly of God: And this our Saviour expreſſeth by *asking*, *ſeeking*, and *knocking*, which ſignifies the importunity of our requeſts; *Our heavenly Father will give his Holy Spirit to them that* thus *ask it*. And then, *ſecondly*, That we improve and make uſe of the grace which

which God affords us; *To him that hath, ſhall be given, and from him that hath not, ſhall be taken away even that which he ſeems to have.* That is, (as appears plainly from the ſcope of the parable) to him that uſeth that grace, and thoſe advantages which God affords him, more ſhall be given; but from him that makes no uſe of them, and therefore is as if he had them not, ſhall be taken away that which he but ſeems to have, becauſe he makes no uſe of it.

Concerning the pardon of ſins; the ſcripture plainly ſuſpends that upon the general condition of repentance, and the change of our lives; *Repent, that your ſins may be forgiven you:* and upon the condition of our forgiving others; *If ye forgive men their treſpaſſes, then will your heavenly father alſo forgive you; but if you forgive not men their treſpaſſes, neither will your father forgive your treſpaſſes,* ſays our Saviour, Matt. vi. 14. 15.

And then the promiſe of eternal life, is every where in ſcripture ſuſpended upon the condition of faith and repentance, and perſeverance in well-doing. *He that believes* (ſays our Saviour) *ſhall be ſaved,* which indeed implies the whole condition of the goſpel. *He that believes*; that is, he that effectually aſſents to the doctrine of Chriſt, and is ſo perſuaded of the truth of it, as to live according to it, *ſhall be ſaved.* But if obedience were not included in the ſcripture notion of faith, yet the ſcripture elſewhere expreſly makes it the condition of our eternal ſalvation. Heb. v. 9. Chriſt is there ſaid to be *the author of eternal ſalvation to them that obey him*; thereby implying, that none ſhall be ſaved by Chriſt, but thoſe that obey the goſpel. Heb. xii. 14. *Follow holineſs, without which no man ſhall ſee the Lord.* Rom. ii. 7. 8. 9. *To them who by patient continuance in well-doing, ſeek for glory and honour, and immortality,* God will give *eternal life*; *but to them that are contentious, and obey not the truth* (that is, the goſpel) *but obey unrighteouſneſs, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguiſh, upon every ſoul of man that doth evil.*

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I cannot well imagine what can reaſonably be anſwered to ſuch plain texts; but I will tell you what is commonly anſwered; namely, That God gives the condition which he requires; and therefore tho' theſe promiſes run in a conditional form, yet in truth they are abſolute; becauſe he that makes a promiſe to another, upon a condition which he will alſo perform, doth in effect make an abſolute promiſe. As if a man promiſed another ſuch an eſtate, upon condition he pay ſuch a ſum for it, and does promiſe withal to furniſh him with that ſum, this in effect amounts to an abſolute promiſe of the eſtate.

And this is very well argued, if the caſe were thus. But God hath no where promiſed to work the condition *in us*, without the concurrence of our own endeavours. God may, and oftentimes doth prevent men by his grace; but he hath no where promiſed to *give his Holy Spirit*, but to them that ask it of him. And he hath no where promiſed to continue his grace and aſſiſtance to us, unleſs we will uſe our ſincere endeavours; nay, in caſe we do not, he hath threatened to take away his grace and aſſiſtance from us. And if this be ſo, then the promiſes of the goſpel do not only ſeem to be conditional, but are really ſo. And it is a wonder that any man ſhould doubt of this, who conſiders how frequently in the New Teſtament the goſpel is repreſented to us under the notion of a covenant: ſuch a covenant in the very nature of it doth imply a mutual obligation between the parties that enter into it. But if the goſpel contains only bleſſings which are promiſed on God's part, without any thing required to be done and performed on our part, in order to the obtaining of thoſe bleſſings, then the goſpel is nothing elſe but a *promiſe*, or *deed of gift*, making over certain benefits and bleſſings to us; but can in no propriety of language in the world be called a covenant: But if there be ſome things required on our part, in order to our being made partakers of the promiſes which God hath made to us, (as the ſcripture every where tells us there is) then the promiſes are plainly conditional. To inſtance in the promiſe of forgiveneſs of ſins;

ſins; *repent, that your ſins may be blotted out*; that is, upon this condition that ye repent of your ſins, they ſhall be forgiven, and not otherwiſe. Can there be any plainer condition in the world, than this in thoſe words of our ſaviour? *If ye forgive men their treſpaſſes, your heavenly father will alſo forgive your treſpaſſes; but if ye forgive not men their treſpaſſes, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your treſpaſſes.*

This is ſo far from being any prejudice to the freeneſs of God's grace, who is infinitely gracious in offering ſuch great bleſſings to us upon any condition that we can perform; that it were one of the abſurdeſt things in the world to imagine that God ſhould grant to men forgiveneſs of ſins, and eternal life, let them behave themſelves as they will.

IV. The laſt thing I propoſed for the explaining of this doctrine of the promiſes of God, was to conſider when men may be ſaid to have a right to theſe promiſes, ſo as to be able upon good grounds to apply them to themſelves: And the anſwer to this is very plain and eaſy: namely, when they find the conditions of theſe promiſes in themſelves; and not till then.

When a man hath truly repented of his ſins, ſo as to forſake them, and lead a new life; and when he does from his heart forgive thoſe who have offended him, and hath laid down all animoſity againſt them, and thoughts of revenge; then hath he a right to the promiſe of pardon and forgiveneſs, and may apply to himſelf in particular what the ſcripture ſaith in general, that God *will blot out all his trangreſſions, and remember his iniquities no more.* When a man doth conſtantly and earneſtly implore the aſſiſtance of God's Holy Spirit, and is ready to yield to the motions of it, and does faithfully make uſe of that ſtrength and aſſiſtance which God affords him, then he may expect the continuance of his grace, and further degrees of it. When a man makes it the conſtant and ſincere endeavour of his life, to pleaſe God, and to *walk in all the ordinances and commandments of the Lord blameleſs*, and is effectu-

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ally taught by the grace of God *to deny ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, and to live ſoberly, and righteouſly, and godly in this preſent world,* then he may with comfort and joy *wait for the bleſſed hope, and the glorious appearance of the great God, and our Saviour Jeſus Chriſt*; then he may with confidence depend upon God, in ſure and certain *hope of that eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, hath promiſed.* When he can ſay with St. Paul, *I have fought a good fight, I have finiſhed my courſe, I have kept the faith,* then he may likewiſe triumph as he did, *henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteouſneſs, which God the righteous judge ſhall give me in that day.*

Upon theſe terms, and in theſe caſes, men may upon good grounds apply to themſelves *theſe exceeding great and precious promiſes* of the goſpel; and ſo far as any man is doubtful and uncertain of the performance of the conditions which the goſpel requires, ſo far he muſt neceſſarily queſtion his right and title to the bleſſings promiſed. And if any man think this doctrine too uncomfortable, and be willing to reject it upon this account, I ſhall only ſay this, that men may cheat themſelves, if they pleaſe, but moſt certainly they will never find any true and ſolid comfort in any other. This is a plain and ſenſible account of a man's confidence and good hopes in the promiſes of God; but for a man to apply any promiſe to himſelf, before he finds the condition in himſelf, is not faith, but either fancy or preſumption.

And therefore it is a very prepoſterous courſe which many take, to adviſe and exhort men, with ſo much earneſtneſs, to apply the promiſes of God to themſelves, and to tell them that they are guilty of great unbelief in not doing it. That which is proper to exhort men to, is to endeavour to perform the condition upon which God hath promiſed any bleſſing to us; and when men find the condition in themſelves, they will without any great perſuaſion take comfort from the promiſe, and apply it to themſelves; but till they diſcern the condition in themſelves, it is impoſſible for a man that underſtands himſelf, to ap-

ply the promiſe to himſelf; for till the condition be performed, he hath no more right to the promiſe, than if ſuch a promiſe had never been made. And it is ſo far from being a ſin in ſuch a man, to doubt of the benefit of ſuch a promiſe, that it is his duty to do ſo; and no man that underſtands himſelf and the promiſes of God, can poſſibly do otherwiſe.

Therefore it is a vain and groundleſs trouble which perplexeth many people, that they cannot apply the promiſes of God to themſelves; whereas the true ground of their trouble ſhould be this, that they have not been careful to perform the condition of thoſe promiſes which they would apply to themſelves; the other is an endleſs trouble; let them but look to the condition, and the promiſe will apply itſelf. I ſpeak all this on purpoſe to free men from thoſe perplexities wherewith many have entangled themſelves, by falſe apprehenſions of the promiſes of God, either as if they were not made to us upon certain conditions to be performed by us, or as if any man could comfortably apply them to himſelf, before he hath performed thoſe conditions upon which God hath made ſuch promiſes. For if men will believe that which is not true, or expect things upon ſuch terms as they are not to be had, they may trouble themſelves eternally, and all the world cannot help it.

I have now done with the firſt thing I propounded to ſpeak to, namely, the promiſes which are here ſpoken of. The ſecond thing (*viz.*) what influence theſe promiſes ought to have upon us, that by them we may be made *partakers of the divine nature*, I ſhall reſerve to another opportunity.

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SERMON XCVIII.

The nature and influence of the promiſes of the goſpel.

2 PETER i. 4.

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promiſes; that by theſe ye might be partakers of the divine nature.

The ſecond ſermon on this text.

I Made entrance into theſe words the laſt day, in the handling whereof I propoſed to do theſe two things:

Firſt, To conſider the *promiſes* here ſpoken of; *Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promiſes.*

Secondly, The influence which theſe promiſes ought to have upon us; *That by theſe ye might be partakers of a divine nature.*

The firſt of theſe I have done with, and proceed now to the

Second, *viz.* The influence which theſe promiſes ought to have upon us; *Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promiſes; that by theſe ye might be partakers of a divine nature.* Not that we can partake of the eſſence and nature of God, as ſome have blaſphemouſly affirmed, pretending, in their canting and ſenſeleſs language, to be godded with God, and chriſted with Chriſt. In this ſenſe it is impoſſible for us to *partake of the divine nature*; for this would be for men to become gods, and to be advanced to the ſtate and perfection of the Deity. But the word φύσις doth frequently in ſcripture ſignify a temper and diſpoſition; and to be *partakers of a divine nature*, is to be of a divine temper and diſpoſition, to have our corrupt natures rectified and

purged from all ſinful luſts and irregular paſſions, and from all vicious and corrupt affections; and therefore it follows in the text, *having eſcaped the corruption that is in the world through luſt; and beſides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godlineſs, and to godlineſs brotherly kindneſs, and to brotherly kindneſs charity.* So that we are made *partakers of a divine nature,* as the Apoſtle here explains it, theſe two ways; by cleanſing ourſelves from the luſts of the fleſh, which the Apoſtle here calls the *corruption* or *defilement which is in the world through luſt*; and by a diligent endeavour after all Chriſtian graces and virtues, faith and temperance, and patience, a ſincere love of the brethren, and an univerſal charity and good-will towards all men.

And that this is the proper influence and efficacy of the great promiſes of the goſpel upon the hearts and lives of men, the Apoſtle St. Paul fully declares to us, 2 Cor. vii. 1. *Having therefore theſe promiſes, dearly beloved, let us cleanſe ourſelves from all filthineſs of the fleſh and ſpirit*; that is, from the luſts of the fleſh, and of uncleanneſs, and from all evil and corrupt affections of the mind, ſuch as wrath, envy, malice, hatred, ſtrife, revenge, cruelty, pride, and the like, *perfecting holineſs in the fear of God*; that is, continually aſpiring ſtill more and more after further degrees of holineſs, and virtue and goodneſs, which are the great perfections of the divine nature. And thus by a conſtant and ſincere endeavour to *cleanſe ourſelves from all impurity of fleſh and ſpirit,* and by practiſing all the virtues of a good life, we ſhall by degrees raiſe and advance ourſelves to a god-like temper and diſpoſition, imitating in all our actions the goodneſs, and mercy, and patience, and truth, and faithfulneſs of God, and all thoſe other perfections of the divine nature, which are comprehended under the term of *holineſs.* This is that which the Apoſtle here calls *partaking of a divine nature*; or, as our bleſſed Saviour expreſſeth it, to

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be perfect, as our Father which is in heaven is perfect.

This the goſpel deſigns to raiſe us to; and one of the great inſtruments whereby this is effected, are thoſe *exceeding great and precious promiſes* which I have inſiſted upon: And they are capable of effecting it theſe two ways:

Firſt, By way of internal efficacy and aſſiſtance; and,

Secondly, By way of external motive and argument: Both theſe ways ſome or other of theſe promiſes have a mighty influence upon us, (if we be not wanting to ourſelves) to raiſe us to a god-like temper and diſpoſition, that is, to the greateſt perfection of virtue and goodneſs which we are capable of in this life.

Firſt, By way of internal efficacy and aſſiſtance. And this influence the promiſe of God's Holy Spirit, and of the gracious help and aſſiſtance thereof, hath upon the minds of men, inclining them to that which is good, and enabling them to do it. For the Holy Spirit is promiſed to us, in conſideration and commiſeration of that impotency and weakneſs which we have contracted in that degenerate and depraved condition into which mankind is ſunk; to help us, who are *without ſtrength*, to recover ourſelves out of that evil and miſerable ſtate into which by wilful tranſgreſſion we are fallen; to *quicken us who are dead in treſpaſſes and ſins*, (as the ſcripture expreſſeth the condition of unregenerate perſons) to *raiſe us to a new life*, and to cheriſh this principle of ſpiritual life, which is commonly weak at firſt, and to carry it through all diſcouragements and oppoſitions; to excite us continually to our duty, and to enable us to the moſt difficult parts of obedience, ſuch as are moſt contrary to our natural inclinations, and againſt the grain of fleſh and blood; to bear down the ſtrength of ſin and temptation; and in all our conflicts with the world, the fleſh and the devil, and all the powers of darkneſs, to make us victorious over them; and in a word, to be a principle within us, more mighty and powerful than the luſts and inclinations of our

evil hearts, than the moſt obſtinate and inveterate habits of ſin and vice, and than all the temptations and terrors of ſenſe. So that if we will make uſe of this aſſiſtance, and lay hold of this ſtrength which God affords us in the goſpel, and (as the Apoſtle expreſſeth it) *be workers together with God*, we need not deſpair of victory and ſucceſs; for our ſtrength will continually increaſe, and the force and violence of our luſts will be abated, God will give us more grace, and we ſhall walk *from ſtrength to ſtrength*, and *our path will be* (as *Solomon* ſays of *the way of the righteous*) *as the light which ſhines more and more unto the perfect day*.

For the Holy Spirit of God conducts and manageth this great work of our ſanctification and ſalvation from firſt to laſt, by opening our hearts to let in the light of divine truth upon our minds, by repreſenting to us with advantage ſuch arguments and conſiderations as are apt to perſuade us to embrace it, and yield to it; by ſecret and gentle reprehenſions ſoftening our hard hearts, and bending our ſtiff and ſtubborn wills to a compliance with the will of God, and our duty. And this is that great work which the ſcripture calls our *regeneration* and *ſanctification*, the *turning us from darkneſs to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, a new creation*, and a *reſurrection from the death of ſin, to the life of holineſs*. And then by leading and directing us in the ways of holineſs and obedience; by quickening our devotion, and ſtirring up in us holy deſires and diſpoſitions of ſoul, rendering us fit to draw near to God in prayer, with a due ſenſe of our own wants and unworthineſs, and an humble confidence in the goodneſs of God, that he will grant us thoſe good things that we ask of him; in ſupporting and comforting us in all our afflictions and ſufferings, eſpecially for truth and righteouſneſs ſake; and by ſealing and confirming to us the bleſſed hopes of eternal life. Thus the Spirit of God carries on the work of our ſanctification, and makes us *partakers of a divine nature*, by way of inward efficacy and aſſiſtance.

Secondly,

Secondly, The promiſes of the goſpel are apt likewiſe to have a mighty influence upon us by way of motive and argument, to engage and encourage us to *cleanſe ourſelves from all filthineſs of fleſh and ſpirit, and to perfect holineſs in the fear of God.* For,

Firſt, A full pardon and indemnity for what is paſt, is a mighty encouragement for us to return to our duty, and a forcible argument to keep us to it for the future. For ſince God, who hath been ſo highly injured and affronted by us, is ſo willing and ready to forgive us, as not only to provide and purchaſe for us the means of pardon, by the grievous ſufferings of his dear Son, but to offer it ſo freely, and invite us ſo earneſtly to accept of it, and to be reconciled to him; the conſideration of this ought in all reaſon, ingenuity and gratitude, to melt us into ſorrow and repentance for our ſins, and a deep ſenſe of the evil of them, and to inflame our hearts with a mighty love to God; and our bleſſed Redeemer, *who hath loved us, and waſhed us from our ſins in his own blood*; and to make us extremely unwilling, nay, moſt firmly reſolved never more to offend that merciful and gracious God, who is ſo ſlow to puniſh, and ſo forward to forgive; and effectually to engage us to a dutiful, and conſtant, and chearful obedience to God's holy laws and commandments, leſt by our wilful tranſgreſſion and violation of them, we ſhould run ourſelves into a deeper guilt, and aggravate our condemnation. Now that by the tender mercies of our God we are made whole, we ſhould be infinitely afraid to ſin any more, leſt worſe things come to us; leſt we relapſe into a more incurable ſtate, and bring a heavier load of guilt and miſery upon ourſelves.

Secondly, The promiſe of God's grace and Holy Spirit is likewiſe a very powerful argument and encouragement to holineſs and goodneſs, engaging us to *cleanſe ourſelves from all filthineſs of fleſh and ſpirit*, that our ſouls and minds may be a fit temple for the Holy Ghoſt, which will not dwell in an impure ſoul: and likewiſe encouraging us hereto, by

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this conſideration, that we have ſo unerring a guide to counſel and direct us, ſo powerful an aſſiſtant *to ſtrengthen* us *with all might in the inner man*, to ſtand by us in all our conflicts with ſin and Satan, and make us (as the Apoſtle expreſſeth it) *more than conquerors* over all our ſpiritual enemies. For though we be weak, and our luſts ſtrong, our enemies many, and temptations mighty and violent; yet we need not be diſheartned, ſo long as we know that *God is with us*, and *the Grace of his Holy Spirit ſufficient for us*, againſt all the ſtrength of ſin and hell; though our duty be hard, and our ſtrength ſmall, yet we cannot fail of ſucceſs, if we be ſure that the omnipotent grace of God is always ready to ſecond our ſincere, though never ſo weak, endeavours. So that when we ſee all the enemies of our ſalvation drawn up in array againſt us, we may encourage ourſelves, as the prophet *Eliſha* did his ſervant, when he told him, that *an hoſt compaſſed the city with horſes and chariots*, and ſaid, *Alas! my maſter, how ſhall we do?* And *he anſwered, fear not, for they that be with us, are more than they that be with them*, 2 Kings vi. 16. Or, as *Hezekiah* comforted the people, when they were afraid of the mighty force of the King of Aſſyria, 2 Chron. xxxii. 7, 8. *Be ſtrong and courageous, be not afraid nor diſmayed for the King of Aſſyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him. With him is an arm of fleſh, but with us is the Lord our God, to help us, and to fight for us.* This is the caſe of every Chriſtian; the force that is againſt us is finite and limited; but the almighty God is on our ſide, and fights for us; and every one of us may ſay with St. Paul, Phil. iv. 13. *I can do all things through Chriſt which ſtrengtheneth me.*

Thirdly, The promiſe of eternal life and happineſs, if duly weighed and conſidered, hath a mighty force in it to take us off from the love and practice of ſin, and to encourage our obedience, and *patient continuance in well-doing*. The aſſurance of enjoying unſpeakable and endleſs happineſs in another world, and of eſcaping extreme and eternal miſery,

ſery, is a conſideration of that weight, as one would think, could not fail of its efficacy upon us, to put all temptations to ſin out of countenance, and to bear down before us all the difficulties and diſcouragements in the way of our duty. And if this make no impreſſion upon us, if heaven and hell be of no weight with us, it will be in vain to uſe any other arguments, which in compariſon of this, are *but as the very ſmall duſt upon the balance.* For if on the one hand the hopes of perfect comfort and joy and felicity, perpetual in duration, and vaſt beyond all imagination, *ſuch as eye hath not ſeen, nor ear heard, nor hath entred into the heart of man to conceive:* And if, on the other hand, the dread of the terrible wrath of God, and of the vengeance of eternal fire together with the inſupportable torments of a guilty conſcience, and the perpetual ſtings of bitter remorſe and anguiſh for the wilful folly of our wicked lives, and the rage of horrible deſpair of ever getting out of ſo miſerable a ſtate; if neither of theſe conſiderations, if both of them will not prevail upon us *to ceaſe to be evil,* and to *reſolve to be good,* that we may obtain one of theſe conditions, and may eſcape the other; there is no hope that any words that can be uſed, any arguments and conſiderations that can be offered, ſhould work upon us, or take place with us. He that is not to be tempted by ſuch hopes, nor to be terrified by ſuch fears, is proof againſt all the force of perſuaſion in the world.

And thus I have done with the two things which I propoſed to conſider from theſe words; the nature of theſe promiſes, and the influence they are apt, and ought to have upon us, to raiſe us to the perfection of virtue and goodneſs, which the Apoſtle here calls our being *partakers of a divine nature.* All that now remains is, to make ſome uſeful reflexions upon what hath been diſcourſed upon theſe two heads.

Firſt of all, If we expect the bleſſings and benefits of theſe *exceeding great and precious promiſes* of the goſpel, we muſt be careful to perform the conditions which are indiſpenſably required on our parts. It is a great miſtake, and of very pernicious conſequence

quence to the ſouls of men, to imagine that the goſpel is all promiſes on God's part, and that our part is only to believe them, and to rely upon God for the performance of them, and to be very confident that he will make them good, though we do nothing elſe but only believe that he will do ſo. That the Chriſtian religion is only a declaration of God's good will to us, without any expectation of duty from us; this is an error which one could hardly think could ever enter into any who have the liberty to read the Bible, and do attend to what they read and find there.

The three great promiſes of the goſpel, are all very expreſly contained in our Saviour's firſt ſermon upon the mount. There we find the promiſe of bleſſedneſs often repeated; but never abſolutely made, but upon certain conditions, and plainly required on our parts; as repentance, humility, righteouſneſs, mercy, peaceableneſs, meekneſs, patience. Forgiveneſs of ſins is likewiſe promiſed; but only to thoſe that make a penitent acknowledgment of them, and ask forgiveneſs for them, and are ready to grant that forgiveneſs to others, which they beg of God for themſelves. The gift of God's Holy Spirit is likewiſe there promiſed; but it is upon condition of our earneſt and importunate prayer to God. The goſpel is every where full of precepts, enjoining duty and obedience on our part, as well as of promiſes on God's part, aſſuring bleſſings to us; nay of terrible threatnings alſo, if we diſobey the precepts of the goſpel. St. Paul gives us the ſum of the goſpel in very few and plain words, declaring upon what terms we may expect that ſalvation which the goſpel offers to all men, Tit. ii. 11, 12, 13, 14. *The grace of God, which bringeth ſalvation hath appeared to all men; teaching us, that denying ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, we ſhould live ſoberly, and righteouſly, and godly in this preſent world, looking for that bleſſed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jeſus Chriſt; who gave himſelf for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himſelf a peculiar people, zealous of good works.*

works. And then he adds, *theſe things ſpeak and exhort, and rebuke with all authority*; intimating, that though men were very averſe to this doctrine, it ought to be inculcated with great authority and earneſtneſs, and thoſe who oppoſed and deſpiſed it, to be ſeverely rebuked; and with great reaſon, becauſe the contrary doctrine does moſt effectually undermine and defeat the whole deſign of the Chriſtian religion.

Secondly, from hence we learn, that if the promiſes of the goſpel have not this effect upon us, to make us *partakers of a divine nature*, it is our own fault, and becauſe we are wanting to ourſelves. God is always ready to do his part, if we do not fail in ours. There is a divine power and efficacy goes along with the goſpel, to make way for the entertainment of it in the hearts of men, where they put no bar and obſtacle to it. But if men will reſiſt the motions of God's bleſſed Spirit, and quench the light of it, and obſtinately hold out againſt the force of truth; God will withdraw his grace and Holy Spirit from them. The goſpel would raiſe us to the perfection of all virtue and goodneſs, and the promiſes of it are admirably fitted to relieve the infirmities and weakneſs of human nature, and *to renew us after the image of God, in righteouſneſs and true holineſs*; to take us off from ſin and vice, and to allure us to goodneſs, and to aſſiſt and encourage us in the practice of it: But if we will not comply with the gracious deſign of God in the goſpel, and ſuffer theſe promiſes to have their due influence and efficacy upon us; we wilfully deprive ourſelves of all the bleſſings and benefits of it, *we reject the counſel of God againſt ourſelves*, and *receive the grace of God in vain*; and by rejecting and deſpiſing his promiſes, we provoke him to execute his threatnings upon us.

Thirdly and *laſtly*, If the promiſes of the Chriſtian religion are apt in their own nature to work this great effect upon us, to make us like to God, and to bring us to ſo near a reſemblance of the divine perfections, to make us good, and juſt, and merciful, and patient, and *holy in all manner of converſation, to purge us from our iniquities*, and *to make us a pe-*

a peculiar and excellent people, zealous of good works; I ſay, if this be the proper tendency of the goſpel, and the promiſes of it, how doth this upbraid the degenerate ſtate of the Chriſtian world at this day, which does ſo abound in all kind of wickedneſs and impiety! ſo that we may cry out as he did, upon reading the goſpel; *profectò aut hoc non eſt evangelium*; *aut nos non ſumus evangelici*; "Either this is not the go-"ſpel which we read, and the Chriſtian religion which "we profeſs; or we are no Chriſtians." We are ſo far from that pitch of goodneſs and virtue which the Chriſtian religion is apt to raiſe men to, and which the Apoſtle here calls the *divine nature*, that a great part of us are degenerated into beaſts and devils, wallowing in abominable and filthy luſts, indulging ourſelves in thoſe deviliſh paſſions of malice and hatred, of ſtrife and diſcord, of revenge and cruelty, of ſedition and diſturbance of the publick peace to that degree, as if *the grace of God* had never *appeared* to us *to teach* us the contrary. And therefore it concerns all thoſe who have the face to call themſelves Chriſtians, to demean themſelves at another rate, and for the honour of their religion, and the ſalvation of their own ſouls, *to have their converſation as becometh the goſpel of Chriſt*; and by departing from the vicious practices of this preſent evil world, to do what in them lies to prevent the judgments of God which hang over us; or if they cannot do that, to *ſave themſelves from this untoward generation.*

SERMON

SERMON XCIX.

The ſupport of good men, under their ſufferings for religion.

1 PETER iv. 19.

Wherefore let them that ſuffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their ſouls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.

The firſt ſermon on this text.

THIS epiſtle was written by St. Peter, who was the Apoſtle of the circumciſion, to the diſperſed Jews, who were newly converted to Chriſtianity; and the deſign of it is to confirm and eſtabliſh them in the profeſſion of it; and to inſtruct them how they ought to demean themſelves toward the Heathen or Gentiles among whom they lived; and more particularly to arm and prepare them for thoſe ſufferings and perſecutions, which he foretells would ſhortly overtake them for the profeſſion of Chriſtianity, that when they ſhould happen, they might not be ſurpriſed and ſtartled at them, as if ſome ſtrange and unexpected thing were come upon them; at the 12th verſe of this chapter, *beloved, think it not ſtrange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you*; that is, do not wonder, and be not aſtoniſhed at it; as *if ſome ſtrange thing happened unto you.*

And then he inſtructs them more particularly, how they ought to behave themſelves under thoſe trials and ſufferings, when they ſhould happen; not only with patience, which men ought to exerciſe under all kinds of ſufferings, upon what account and cauſe ſoever; but with joy and chearfulneſs; conſidering the glorious example and reward of them, ver. 13.

But rejoice, in as much as ye are partakers of Chriſt's ſufferings: that when his glory ſhall be revealed, ye may be glad alſo with exceeding joy: And at the 14th verſe he tells them, that beſides the encouragement of ſo great an example, and ſo glorious a reward, they ſhould be ſupported and aſſiſted in a very extraordinary manner by the Spirit of God reſting upon them in a glorious manner, as a teſtimony of the divine power and preſence with them: ver. 14. *If ye be reproached for the name of Chriſt, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God reſteth upon you;* or as it is in the beſt copies, *for the Spirit of glory and of power, even the Spirit of God reſteth upon you;* that is, the glorious power of the divine Spirit is preſent with you, to comfort and bear up your ſpirits under theſe ſufferings. But then he cautions them to take great care, that their ſufferings be for a good cauſe, and a good conſcience; ver. 15. *But let none of you ſuffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil-doer* (that is, as an offender in any kind againſt human laws, made to preſerve the peace and good order of the world) *or as a buſy body in other mens matters;* that is, as a pragmatical perſon, that meddles out of his own ſphere, to the diſquiet and diſturbance of human ſociety: for to ſuffer upon any of theſe accounts, would be matter of ſhame and trouble, but not of joy and comfort; but if they ſuffered upon account of the profeſſion of Chriſtianity, this would be no cauſe of ſhame and reproach to them; but they ought rather to give God thanks for calling them to ſuffer in ſo good a cauſe, and upon ſo glorious an account, ver. 16. *Yet if any man ſuffer as a Chriſtian* (if that be his only crime) *let him not be aſhamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf; for the time is come, that judgment muſt begin at the houſe of God;* that is, the wiſe and juſt providence of God hath ſo ordered it at this time, for very good reaſons and ends, that the firſt calamities and ſufferings ſhould fall upon Chriſtians, the peculiar people and church of God, for their trial, and a teſtimony of the truth of that religion, which God was now planting in the world: *And if it firſt begin at us* (that is,

is, at us Jews, who were the ancient people of God, and have now embraced and entertained the revelation of the goſpel) *what ſhall the end be of them, that obey not the goſpel of God?* That is, (how much more ſeverely will God deal with the reſt of the Jews who have crucified the Son of God, and ſtill perſiſt in ther infidelity and diſobedience to the Goſpel?) *And if the righteous ſcarcely be ſaved, where ſhall the ungodly and the ſinner appear?* (That is, if good men be ſaved with ſo much difficulty, and muſt *through ſo many tribulations enter into the kingdom of God,* what will become of all ungodly and impenitent ſinners? where ſhall they appear? how ſhall they be able to ſtand in the judgment of the great day?) From the conſideration of all which, the Apoſtle makes this inference or concluſion, in the laſt verſe of this chapter, *wherefore, let them that ſuffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their ſouls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.*

Thus you ſee the connexion and dependence of theſe words upon the Apoſtle's foregoing diſcourſe. I ſhall explain the ſeveral expreſſions in the text, and then handle the main points contained in them.

The expreſſions to be explained are theſe: What is meant by *thoſe that ſuffer according to the will of God*; what by *committing the keeping of our ſouls to God, as unto a faithful Creator*; and what by *well-doing.*

Firſt, What is meant by *ſuffering according to the will of God.* This may be underſtood of ſuffering in a good cauſe, ſuch as God will approve; but this is not ſo probable, becauſe this is mentioned afterwards in the following expreſſions *of committing the keeping of our ſouls to God in well-doing*; that is, in ſuffering upon a good account: And therefore the plain and genuine ſenſe of this expreſſion ſeems to be this, that thoſe who, according to the good pleaſure of God's will, and the wiſe diſpenſation of his providence, are appointed to ſuffer for his cauſe, ſhould demean themſelves ſo and ſo: *let them that ſuffer according to the will of God,* that is, thoſe whom God thinks fit to call to ſuffering. And this agrees

very well with the like expreſſion, chap. iii. of this epiſtle, ver. 17. *For it is better if the will of God be ſo,* (that is, if God hath ſo appointed it, and think it fit) *that ye ſuffer for well-doing, than for evil-doing.*

Secondly, What is here meant by *committing the keeping of our ſouls to God, as to a faithful Creator.* That is, to depoſite our lives, and all that belongs to us, in a word, ourſelves, in the hands and cuſtody of his merciful care and providence who made us, and therefore we may be ſure will faithfully keep what we commit to him: For as we are his creatures, he is engaged to take care of us, and will not abandon the work of his own hands. Beſides that he hath promiſed to be more eſpecially concerned for good men, to ſupport them in their ſufferings for a good cauſe, and to reward them for it; *and he is faithful that hath promiſed.*

And therefore there is great reaſon and great encouragement, in all our ſufferings for God's cauſe and truth, to commit our ſouls to his care and cuſtody: our ſouls, that is (as I ſaid before) our lives, and all that belongs to us; in a word, ourſelves: for ſo the word *ſoul* is frequently uſed both in the Old and New Teſtament; Pſal. vii. 5. *Let the enemy perſecute my ſoul, and take it*: that is, my life; for ſo it follows in the next words; *yea let him tread down my life upon the earth.* And Pſal. liv. 3. *Oppreſſors ſeek after my ſoul.* And Pſal. lix. 3. *They lie in wait for my ſoul*; that is, my life. And Pſal. xvi. 10. *Thou wilt not leave my ſoul in hell, my ſoul,* that is, *myſelf*; thou wilt not ſuffer me to continue in the grave, and under the power of death, but wilt raiſe me up to life again. And ſo likewiſe in the New Teſtament, Mar. viii. 35. *Whoſoever will ſave his life ſhall loſe it; but whoſoever ſhall loſe his life for my ſake and the goſpel's, the ſame ſhall ſave it.* The ſame word which is here rendered *life,* in the very next verſe is rendered *ſoul: For what ſhall it profit a man; if he ſhall gain the whole world, and loſe his own ſoul?* that is, his life. And ſo likewiſe, John xii. 25. *He that loveth his life, ſhall loſe it: and*

and he that hateth his life in this world (in the original the word ſignifies *ſoul*) *he that hateth his life in this world* (that is, who neglecteth and expoſeth his life in this world, for the ſake of Chriſt) *ſhall keep it unto life eternal.* And Luke ix. 25. that which the other Evangeliſt renders by the word *ſoul*, or *life*, he renders *himſelf*; *for what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world and loſe himſelf?* and ſo here in the text, *to commit the keeping of our ſouls to God*, is to commit ourſelves to his care and providence.

Thirdly, What is here meant by *committing ourſelves to him in well-doing*: By *well-doing* is here meant, a fixed purpoſe and reſolution of doing our duty, notwithſtanding all hazards and ſufferings; which is called by St. Paul, Rom. ii. 7. *a patient continuance in well-doing.* It ſignifies ſometimes acts of goodneſs and charity; but in this epiſtle it is taken in a larger ſenſe, for conſtancy and reſolution in the doing of our duty; as chap. ii. 15. *For ſo is the will of God, that with well-doing* (that is, by a reſolute conſtancy in a good courſe) *ye may put to ſilence the ignorance of fooliſh men.* And ver. 20. *But if when ye do well, and ſuffer for it*; (that is, if when ye ſuffer for well-doing,) *ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.* And chap. iii. ver. 6. *As long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement*; that is, are reſolute and conſtant in doing your duty, notwithſtanding all threatnings and terrors. And ver. 17. *For it is better, if the will of God be ſo, that ye ſuffer for well-doing than for evil-doing*; that is, for your religion and conſtancy in ſo good a cauſe, as Chriſtians, and not as criminals upon any other account.

So that the plain meaning of the words is, as if the Apoſtle had ſaid, wherefore being forewarned of ſuffering and perſecution for the cauſe of religion, the ſum of my direction and advice upon the whole matter is this; that ſince it is the will of God that ye ſhould ſuffer upon this account, commit yourſelves, in the conſtant diſcharge of your duty, and a good

conſcience, to the particular care and providence of Almighty God, as your faithful Creator.

And now I come to handle the particular points contained in the words; and they are theſe three:

Firſt, That when men do ſuffer really and truly for the cauſe of religion, they may with confidence commit themſelves (their lives, and all that is dear to them) to the particular and more eſpecial care of the divine providence.

Secondly, Always provided, that we do nothing contrary to our duty, and a good conſcience; for this the Apoſtle means, *by committing ourſelves to God, in well-doing*. If we ſtep out of the way of our duty, or do any thing contrary to it, God's providence will not be concerned for us, to bear us out in ſuch ſufferings.

Thirdly, I ſhall conſider what ground of comfort and encouragement the conſideration of God, as a *faithful Creator*, affords to us in all our ſufferings for a good cauſe and a good conſcience.

Firſt, When men do ſuffer really and truly for the cauſe of religion, and God's truth, they may with confidence and good aſſurance commit themſelves (their lives and all that is ſo dear to them) to the particular and more eſpecial care of his providence. In the handling of this, I ſhall conſider theſe three things:

I. When men may be ſaid to ſuffer really and truly for the cauſe of religion; and when not.

II. How far they may rely upon the providence of God, to bear them out in theſe ſufferings.

III. What ground and reaſon there is to expect the more particular and eſpecial care of God's providence, in caſe of ſuch ſufferings.

I. When men may be ſaid to ſuffer really and truly for the cauſe of religion, and God's truth; and when not. In theſe caſes,

Firſt, When men ſuffer for not renouncing the true religion, and becauſe they will not openly declare againſt it, and apoſtatize from it. But it will be ſaid, that in all theſe caſes the queſtion is, What is the true religion? To which I anſwer, that all diſcourſes of this nature, about ſuffering for religion, do

do ſuppoſe the truth of ſome religion or other. And among Chriſtians, the truth of the Chriſtian religion is taken for granted, wherever we ſpeak of mens ſuffering perſecution for it. And the plaineſt caſe among Chriſtians, is, when they are perſecuted, becauſe they will not openly deny and renounce the Chriſtian religion. And this was generally the caſe of the primitive Chriſtians; they were threatened with tortures and death, becauſe they would not renounce Jeſus Chriſt and his religion, and give demonſtration thereof, by offering ſacrifices to the heathen Gods.

Secondly, Men do truly ſuffer for the cauſe of religion, when they are perſecuted, only for making an open profeſſion of the Chriſtian religion by joining in the aſſemblies of Chriſtians for the worſhip of God; though they be not urged to deny and diſclaim it, but only to conceal and diſſemble the profeſſion of it, ſo as to forbear the maintenance and defence of it upon fitting occaſions, againſt the objections of thoſe who are adverſaries of it. For to conceal the profeſſion of it, and to decline the defence of it, when juſt occaſion is offered, is *to be aſhamed of it*, which our Saviour interprets to be a kind of denial of it, and is oppoſed to the *confeſſing of him before men*, Matth. x. 32. 33. *Whoſoever ſhall confeſs me before men, him will I alſo confeſs before my Father which is in heaven: But whoſoever ſhall deny me before men, him will I alſo deny before my Father which is in heaven.* And this by St. Mark is expreſſed by *being aſhamed of Chriſt*; that is, afraid and aſhamed to make an open profeſſion of him, and his religion; Mark viii. 38. *Whoſoever therefore ſhall be aſhamed of me and of my words, in this adulterous and ſinful generation, of him alſo ſhall the Son of man be aſhamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy Angels.*

And this likewiſe was the caſe of the primitive Chriſtians under the moderate Emperors, when the perſecution of them was not ſo hot, as to drive them to a denial of Chriſt, provided they would be contented to conceal and diſſemble their religion, in that caſe they did not hunt them out, nor perſecute them

them to renounce their religion, if they made no diſcovery of themſelves. But yet they who ſuffered, becauſe they would not conceal their profeſſion of Chriſtianity, did truly ſuffer for the cauſe of religion.

Thirdly, Men do likewiſe truly ſuffer for the cauſe of religion, when they ſuffer for not betraying it, by any indirect and unworthy means; ſuch as among the primitive Chriſtians was the delivering up their bibles to the Heathen, to be burnt and deſtroyed by them: For to give up that holy book, which is the great inſtrument of our religion, is in effect to give up Chriſtianity itſelf, and conſent to the utter extirpation of it.

And ſuch likewiſe is the caſe of thoſe, who ſuffer in any kind for not contributing to break down the fences of religion in any nation, where the providence of God hath given it a legal eſtabliſhment and ſecurity; or, in a word, for refuſing to countenance and further any deſign, which viſibly tends to the ruin of religion: For to deſtroy religion, and to take away that which hinders the deſtruction of it, are in effect much the ſame thing.

Fourthly, Men do truly ſuffer for the cauſe of religion, when they ſuffer for the maintenance and defence of any neceſſary and fundamental article of it, though they be not required to renounce the whole Chriſtian religion: For what St. Paul ſays of the article of *the reſurrection of the dead*, is true of any other neceſſary article of the Chriſtian religion, that the denial of it is a ſubverſion of the whole Chriſtian faith; becauſe it tends directly to the overthrowing of Chriſtianity, being a wound given to it in a vital and eſſential part. And this was the caſe of thoſe, who in any age of Chriſtianity have been perſecuted by Hereticks, for the defence of any article of Chriſtianity.

And I cannot but obſerve by the way, that after the heathen perſecutions were ceaſed, perſecution was firſt begun among the Chriſtians by Hereticks; and hath ſince been taken up, and carried much beyond that bad pattern, by the church of Rome; which, beſides a ſtanding inquiſition in all countries, which

are

are intirely of that religion (a court, the like whereto, for the clancular and ſecret manner of proceeding, for the unjuſt and arbitrary rules of it, for the barbarous uſage of mens perſons, and the cruelty of its torments, to extort confeſſions from them, the ſun never ſaw erected under any government in the world, by men of any religion whatſoever) I ſay, which, beſides this court, hath by frequent croiſadoes for the extirpation of Hereticks, and by many bloody maſſacres in France and Ireland, and ſeveral other places, deſtroyed far greater numbers of Chriſtians, than all the ten heathen perſecutions; and hath of late revived, and to this very day continues in the ſame or greater cruelties, and a fiercer perſecution of Proteſtants, if all the circumſtances of it be conſidered, than was ever yet practiſed upon them; and yet whilſt this is doing almoſt before our eyes in one of our next neighbour nations, they have the face to complain of the cannibal laws and bloody perſecutions of the church of England, and the confidence to ſet up for the great patrons of liberty of conſcience, and enemies of all compulſion and force in matters of religion.

Fifthly, Men do truly ſuffer for the cauſe of God and religion, when they ſuffer for aſſerting and maintaining the purity of the Chriſtian doctrine and worſhip; and for oppoſing and not complying with thoſe groſs errors and corruptions, which ſuperſtition and ignorance had, in a long courſe of time, brought into the Chriſtian religion. Upon this account many good people ſuffered in many paſt ages, for reſiſting the growing errors and corruptions of the church of Rome, which at firſt crept in by degrees, but at laſt broke in like a mighty flood, which carried down all before it, and threatened ruin and deſtruction to all that oppoſed them. Upon this account alſo, infinite numbers ſuffered among the Waldenſes and Albigenſes, in Bohemia, and in England, and in moſt other countries in this weſtern part of Chriſtendom. And they who ſuffered upon this account, ſuffered in a good cauſe, and for the teſtimony of the truth.

Sixthly,

Sixthly, and *laſtly*, Men do truly ſuffer for the cauſe of religion, when they ſuffer for not diſclaiming and renouncing any clear and undoubted truth of God whatſoever; yea though it be not a fundamental point and article of religion.

And this is the caſe of thoſe many thouſands, who ever ſince the IVth council of Lateran, which was in the year 1215, (when tranſubſtantiation was firſt defined to be an article of faith, and neceſſary to ſalvation to be believed) were perſecuted with fire and ſword, for not underſtanding thoſe words of our Saviour, *this is my body* (which are ſo eaſily capable of a reaſonable ſenſe) in the abſurd and impoſſible ſenſe of tranſubſtantiation. And though this diſowning of this doctrine, be no expreſs and direct article of the Chriſtian religion; yet it is a fundamental article of right reaſon and common ſenſe: Becauſe the admitting of tranſubſtantiation, does undermine the foundation of all certainty whatſoever, and does more immediately ſhake the very foundation of Chriſtianity itſelf. Yea, though the Chriſtian religion were noways concerned in this doctrine, yet out of reverence to reaſon and truth, and a juſt animoſity and indignation at confident nonſenſe, a man of an honeſt and generous mind, would as ſoon be brought to declare or ſwear, that twice two do not make four, but five, as to profeſs his belief of tranſubſtantiation.

And though all truths are not of equal conſequence and concernment; yet all truth is of God; and for that reaſon, though we are not obliged to make an open profeſſion of all truths at all times, yet we are bound not to deny or renounce any truth, nor to make profeſſion of a known falſhood or error: For it is merely becauſe of the intrinſical evil of the thing, that *it is impoſſible for God to lie*; and the Son of God thought it worth his coming into the world, and laying down his life, *to bear witneſs to the truth.* So he himſelf tells us, John xviii. 37. *To this end was I born, and for this cauſe came I into the world, that I ſhould bear witneſs to the truth.*

Thus

Thus have I ſhewn you in theſe plain inſtances, (to which moſt other caſes may be reduced) when men may be ſaid to ſuffer truly for the cauſe of religion, and truth.

I ſhall mention two or three caſes wherein men may ſeem to ſuffer for the cauſe of religion, but cannot truly be ſaid to do ſo.

Firſt, When men raſhly expoſe themſelves to danger, and run upon ſufferings for the ſake of religion. Thus ſeveral of the primitive Chriſtians voluntarily expoſed themſelves when they were not called in queſtion, and in the heat of their affection and zeal for God and religion, offered themſelves to martyrdom, when none enquired after them. This, in the gracious interpretation of God, who knowing the ſincerity of their zeal, was pleaſed to overlook the indiſcrete forwardneſs and raſhneſs of it, might be accepted for a kind of martyrdom; but cannot in reaſon be juſtified, ſo as to be fit to be made a pattern, and to be recommended to our imitation. For though God may be pleaſed to excuſe the weakneſs of a well-meaning zeal: Yet he can approve nothing but what is reaſonable.

To ſuffer chearfully for the cauſe of God and his truth, when he calls us to *fight this good fight of faith*, and to *reſiſt unto blood*; and when we are reduced to that ſtrait, that we muſt either die for God and his truth, or deny them; to ſuffer, I ſay, in this caſe with courage and patience, is one of the nobleſt of all the Chriſtian virtues. But to be perfect volunteers, and to run ourſelves upon ſufferings, when we are not called to them, looks rather like *the ſacrifice of fools*; which though God may mercifully excuſe, and pardon the evil of the action, for the good meaning of it; ye he can never perfectly approve and accept of it. But I think there is little need now-a-days to caution men againſt this raſhneſs; it is well if they have the grace and reſolution to ſuffer when it is their duty, and when they are called to it.

Secondly, Nor can men be truly ſaid to ſuffer for the cauſe of religion, when they ſuffer not for their faith,

faith, but their fancy, and for the wilful and affected error of a miſtaken conſcience. As when men ſuffer for indifferent things, which in heat and paſſion they call *ſuperſtition* and *idolatry*; and for their own falſe opinions in religion, which they miſtake for fundamental articles of the Chriſtian faith. In this caſe, their miſtake about theſe things will not change the nature of them, nor turn their ſufferings into martyrdom; and yet many men have certainly ſuffered for their own miſtakes. For as men may be ſo far deluded, as to *think they do God good ſervice*, when they kill his faithful ſervants; ſo likewiſe may they be ſo far deceived, as to ſacrifice their lives, and all that is dear to them, to their own culpable errors and miſtakes. But this is zeal without knowledge, not *the wiſdom which deſcends from above*, but that which comes from beneath, and is like the fire of hell, which is heat without light.

Thirdly and *laſtly*, Nor can men truly be ſaid to ſuffer for the cauſe of God and religion, when they ſuffer for the open profeſſion and defence of truths not neceſſary. For though a man be obliged to make an open profeſſion of all fundamental and neceſſary truths, yet he is under no ſuch obligation to make profeſſion of truths not neceſſary at all times; and unleſs he be called to deny them, he is not bound either to declare or defend them; he may hold his peace at other times, and be ſilent about them, eſpecially when the open profeſſion of them will probably do no good to others, and will certainly do hurt to ourſelves, and the zealous endeavour to propagate ſuch truths will be to the greater prejudice of charity, and the diſturbance of the publick peace of the church.

It was a good ſaying of Eraſmus, (if we underſtand it as I believe he meant it, of truths not neceſſary) *Adeo inviſa ſunt mihi diſcordiæ, ut veritas etiam contentioſa diſpliceat*: *I am* (ſays he) *ſo perfect a hater of diſcord, that I am even diſpleaſed with truth, when it is the occaſion of contention.* As a man is never to deny truth, ſo neither is he obliged to make an open profeſſion of truths not neceſſary

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at all times; and if he suffer upon that account, he cannot justify it to his own prudence, nor have comfort in such sufferings; because he brings them needlessly upon himself; and no man can have comfort, but in suffering for doing his duty.

And thus I have done with the first thing I proposed to enquire into; namely, when men may be truly said to suffer for the cause of religion.

I proceed now to the

II. Enquiry; namely, how far men may rely upon the providence of God, to bear them out in such sufferings?

To which I answer, That provided we do what becomes us, and is our duty on our part, the providence of God will not be wanting on his part, to bear us out in all our sufferings for his cause, one of these three ways:

First, To secure us from that violent degree of temptation and suffering, which would be too strong for human strength and patience; or,

Secondly, In case of such extraordinary temptation and trial, to give us the extraordinary supports and comforts of his Holy Spirit; or else,

Thirdly, In case of a temporary fall and miscarriage, to raise us up by repentance, and a greater resolution and constancy under sufferings. I shall speak severally to these.

First, Either the providence of God will not be wanting to secure us from that violent degree of temptation and suffering, which would be too strong for human strength and patience to bear. And this is a great security to good men, against the fears of a final miscarriage, after all their labours, and pains, and sufferings in a religious course, by being overborn at last by the assault of a very violent and powerful temptation. Not but that the best of men ought always to have a prudent distrust of themselves, so as to keep them from security; according to the Apostle's caution and counsel; *Be not high-minded, but fear*; and *let him that stands, take heed lest he fall*; because till we come to heaven, we shall never be out of the danger and possibility of falling; but

yet for all this, we may hope, by the ſincerity and firmneſs of our reſolution, under the uſual influence of God's grace, to acquit ourſelves like men, in ordinary caſes of temptation and ſuffering.

And to this end, we ſhould repreſent to ourſelves *thoſe exceeding great and precious promiſes*, which he hath made to good men, and his merciful providence, which continually watcheth over them, and ſteers their courſe for them in this world, among thoſe many rocks, which they are in danger to ſplit upon; that he is able to *ſtabliſh us in the truth*, and to *keep us from falling, to preſent us faultleſs before the preſence of his glory with exceeding joy, and to preſerve us to his heavenly kingdom*; and that if we do not forſake him, and forfeit his care and protection, he will *keep us by his mighty power through faith unto ſalvation*; either by his merciful foreſight and prevention of thoſe temptations which would probably be too hard for us; or, if he thinks fit they ſhould befal us, by ſupporting us under them in an extraordinary manner.

For I doubt not, but that the beſt men do owe their ſecurity and perſeverance in goodneſs, much more to the merciful providence of God, preventing the aſſaults of violent and dangerous temptations, than to the firmneſs and conſtancy of their own reſolutions. For there are very few perſons of ſo firm and reſolute virtue, but that one time or other a temptation might aſſault them upon ſuch a diſadvantage, as would in all probability not only ſtagger them, but bear them down. Now herein the providence of God towards good men is very remarkable, in ſecuring them from thoſe temptations which are too ſtrong for them to grapple withal; like a kind and tender father, who, if he be ſatisfied of the dutiful diſpoſition of his child towards him, will not try his obedience to the utmoſt, nor permit too ſtrong a temptation to the contrary to come in his way. So the Pſalmiſt repreſents God's tender regard and conſideration of the frailty and infirmity of his children, Pſalm ciii. 13, 14. *Like as a father pitieth his children, ſo the Lord pitieth them that fear him: For he*

he knoweth our frame, he remembreth that we are but duſt; that is, he conſidereth us as men, and deals with us accordingly. Provided we be ſincere, he will not ſuffer us to be ſet upon by temptations that are too big for us. And therefore our bleſſed Saviour makes it one of the petitions of that excellent prayer, which he hath recommended to us; *Lead us not into temptation*; that is, we ſhould every day beg of God, that his providence would keep us out of the way of great and dangerous temptations, as knowing that this will be a greater ſecurity to us, than any ſtrength and reſolution of our own.

Secondly, Or in caſe of ſuch violent and extraordinary temptations, the providence of God will not be wanting to give us the extraordinary ſupport and comfort of his Holy Spirit, to bear us up under them. The providence of God did take care of good men in all ages, and did afford comfort to them under great trials and ſufferings; but God never made ſo expreſs and general a promiſe of this, to all good men, as he hath done by the Chriſtian religion. Never was ſo conſtant a preſence and influence of the divine Spirit vouchſafed and aſſured to men under any diſpenſation, as that of the goſpel; wherein the Spirit of God is promiſed to all that ſincerely embrace the Chriſtian religion, to reſide and dwell in them; not only to all the purpoſes of ſanctification and holineſs, but of ſupport and comfort under the heavieſt preſſures and ſufferings. For which reaſon the goſpel is called *the miniſtration of the Spirit*; and is upon this account ſaid to be more glorious than any other revelation which God had ever made to mankind.

We are naturally apt to be very much diſheartened and caſt down at the apprehenſion of great ſufferings, from the conſideration of our own weakneſs and frailty; but the Spirit of Chriſt dwells in all true Chriſtians, and the ſame glorious power which raiſed up Jeſus from the dead, works mightily in them that believe. St. Paul uſeth very high expreſſions about this matter, Eph. i. 19. *That ye may know* (ſaith he, ſpeaking to all Chriſtians) *what is the exceeding*

ceeding greatneſs of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power; which he wrought in Chriſt when he raiſed him from the dead, and ſet him at his own right hand. So that every Chriſtian is endued with a kind of omnipotence, *being able* (as St. Paul ſpeaks of himſelf) *to do* and to endure *all things, through Chriſt ſtrengthening him.* Of ourſelves we are very weak, and the temptations and terrors of the world are very powerful; but there is a principle reſiding in every true Chriſtian that is able to bear us up againſt the world, and the power of all its temptations. *Whatſoever is born of God* (ſaith St. John) *overcometh the world; for greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.* The Holy Spirit of God, which dwells in all true Chriſtians, is a more powerful principle of reſolution, and courage, and patience, under the ſharpeſt trials and ſufferings, than the evil ſpirit which rules in the world is, to ſtir up, and ſet on the malice and rage of the world againſt us. *Ye are of God, little children*; (he ſpeaks this to the youngeſt and weakeſt Chriſtians) *Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome, becauſe greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.* The malice and power of the devil is very great; but the goodneſs and power of God is greater. And therefore in caſe of extraordinary temptation, good men, by virtue of this promiſe of God's Holy Spirit, may expect to be born up and comforted in a very extraordinary and ſupernatural manner, under the greateſt tribulations and ſufferings for righteouſneſs ſake.

And this was in a very ſignal and remarkable manner afforded to the primitive Chriſtians, under thoſe fierce and cruel perſecutions to which they were expoſed. And this may ſtill be expected, in like caſes of extraordinary ſufferings for the teſtimony of God's truth. *If ye be reproached* (ſaith St. Peter in this 4th chap. ver. 14.) *for the name of Chriſt, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God reſteth upon you.* The Spirit of God is here promiſed to ſtrengthen and ſupport all that ſuffer for the name of Chriſt, in a very conſpicuous and glorious manner, according

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ing to that prayer of St Paul, Col. i. 11. that Chriſtians might be *ſtrengthened with all might, according to God's glorious power, unto all patience and long-ſuffering, with joyfulneſs.* For when God is pleaſed to exerciſe good men with trials more than human, and ſuch ſufferings as are beyond the common rate of human ſtrength and patience to bear, he hath engaged himſelf to endue and aſſiſt them with more than human courage and reſolution. So St. Paul tells the Corinthians, who had not then felt the utmoſt rage of perſecution, 1 Cor. x. 13. *No temptation or trial hath* yet *befallen you but what is common to man*; that is, nothing but what is frequently incident to human nature, and what by human ſtrength, with an ordinary aſſiſtance of God's grace, may be grappled withal. *But*, in caſe God ſhall call you to extraordinary ſufferings, *he is faithful that hath promiſed, who will not ſuffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation alſo make a way to eſcape, that ye may be able to bear it*; that is, as he hath ordered and appointed ſo great a temptation or trial to befal you, ſo he will take care that it ſhall have a happy iſſue, by enabling you to bear it, by affording you grace and ſtrength equal to the violence and power of the temptation. For as he is ſaid to *fall into temptation*, that is conquered by it; ſo he is ſaid to get out of it, or eſcape it, who is enabled to bear it, and, in ſo doing, gets the better of it. And for this we may rely upon the faithfulneſs of God, who hath promiſed *that we ſhall not be tried above our ſtrength*; either not above the ſtrength which we have, or not above the ſtrength which he will afford us in ſuch a caſe.

And why then ſhould we be daunted at the apprehenſion of any ſuffering whatſoever, if we be ſecured that our comfort ſhall be increaſed in proportion to our trouble, and our ſtrength in proportion to the ſharpneſs and weight of our ſufferings? Or elſe,

Thirdly, In caſe of temporary falling, the providence and goodneſs of God will give them the grace and opportunity of recovering themſelves from their fall by repentance. For the providence of God may

ſometimes, for wiſe ends and reaſons, ſee it fit to leave good men to their own frailty, and to faint and fall ſhamefully under ſufferings, ſo as to renounce and deny the truth; ſometimes to puniſh their vain confidence in themſelves, as in the caſe of Peter, who declared more reſolution, and bore it but with a greater confidence than any of the diſciples, when he ſaid to our Saviour, *though all men forſake thee, yet will not I*; and yet after this he fell more ſhamefully than any of the reſt, ſo as to deny his maſter with horrid oaths and imprecations, and this, though our Saviour had prayed particularly for him, *that his faith might not fail.* From which inſtance we may learn, that God doth not engage himſelf abſolutely to ſecure good men from falling, in caſe of a great temptation and trial; but if they be ſincere, he will not permit them to fall finally, though he may ſuffer them to miſcarry grievouſly for a time, to convince them of the vanity of their confidence in themſelves and their own ſtrength.

Sometimes God may ſuffer good men to fall, in order to their more glorious recovery, and the greater demonſtration and triumph of their faith and conſtancy afterwards, which was the caſe of that happy inſtrument of our reformation here in England, Archbiſhop Cranmer, who after he had been ſo great a champion of the reformation, was ſo overcome with fear, upon the apprehenſion of his approaching ſufferings, as to ſubſcribe thoſe errors of the church of Rome, which he had ſo ſtoutly oppoſed a great part of his life: But he did not long continue in this ſtate, but by the grace of God, which had not forſaken him, was brought to repentance; and when he came to ſuffer, gave ſuch a teſtimony of it, and of his faith, and conſtancy, as was more glorious, and more to the confirmation of the faith of others, than a ſimple martyrdom could have been, if he had not fallen; for when he was brought to the ſtake, he put his right hand (with which he had ſigned the recantation) into the fire, and with an undaunted conſtancy held it there, till it was quite burnt, for a teſtimony of his true repentance for that foul miſcar-

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riage; and when he had done, gave the reſt of his body to be burnt, which he endured with great courage and chearfulneſs to the laſt. So that he made all the amends poſſible for ſo great a fault; and the goodneſs of God, and the power of his grace was more glorified in his repentance and recovery than if he had never fallen.

But what ſhall we ſay, when, notwithſtanding theſe promiſes of extraordinary comfort and ſupport, in caſe of extraordinary ſufferings, ſo great numbers are ſeen to faint in the day of trial, and to fall off from their ſtedfaſtneſs; of which there were many ſad inſtances among the primitive Chriſtians, and have likewiſe been of late in our own times, and in places nearer to us? This I confeſs is a very melancholy conſideration, but yet, I think, is capable of a ſufficient anſwer.

And *firſt* of all, let this be eſtabliſhed for a firm and undoubted principle, that *God is faithful to his promiſe*; and therefore we ought much rather to ſuppoſe in all theſe caſes, that there is ſome default on our part, than any failure and unfaithfulneſs on God's part. Thus St. Paul determines in a like caſe, when the promiſe of God ſeemed not to be made good to the Jews, he lays the blame of it on their unbelief, but acquits God of any unfaithfulneſs in his promiſe, Rom. iii. 3. 4. *For what if ſome did not believe, ſhall their unbelief make the faith* (or fidelity) *of God without effect? God forbid: Yea, let God be true, but every man a liar.* This I confeſs does not anſwer the difficulty; but yet it ought to incline and diſpoſe us to interpret what can fairly be offered for the removal of it, with all the favour that may be on God's ſide. I ſay then,

Secondly, That when good men fall in caſe of extraordinary temptation, and recover again by repentance, and give greater demonſtration afterwards of their conſtancy and reſolution, in the cauſe of God and his truth, the faithfulneſs of God in his promiſes is ſufficiently vindicated, as in the caſes I mentioned; becauſe the promiſe of God is not abſolute, that good men ſhall be preſerved from falling; but that

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the temptation ſhall have a happy iſſue, and that they ſhall not finally miſcarry. For promiſes of this nature are to be interpreted by us, and underſtood as we do our Saviour's prayer for Peter before his fall, *that his faith ſhould not fail* finally; but though he fell through too much confidence in himſelf, he ſhould through the grace of God aſſiſting him be enabled to recover by repentance.

Thirdly, The ſincerity or inſincerity of men in the profeſſion of the true religion, is a thing which we cannot certainly know, becauſe we do not ſee into mens hearts; but *he who knows the heart, and tries the ſpirits of men in a balance*, cannot be deceived in this matter; and where men are not ſincere, the promiſe of God is not concerned to hinder them from diſcovering themſelves; and the fall of ſuch perſons is no reflexion upon the faithfulneſs of God. And it is reaſonable enough to preſume, that this may be the caſe of not a few, and that (like *Simon Magus*) after they have made a very ſolemn profeſſion of Chriſtianity, *their hearts may not be right in the ſight of God.*

Fourthly, If we put the caſe at the hardeſt, that ſome that were very ſincere, after they had held out a great while, under the extremity of torments, have at laſt fainted under them, and yielded to the malice and cruelty of their perſecutors, and in this amazement and diſtraction have not long after expired, without any teſtimony of their repentance: In this caſe, both reaſon and charity ought to reſtrain us from paſſing any very poſitive and ſevere ſentence upon the ſtate of ſuch perſons. For what do we know but God, whoſe goodneſs will certainly make all the allowance to human frailty that reaſon can require; (*for he knows whereof we are made, and remembers that we are but duſt*; he mercifully conſiders every man's caſe, and weighs all the circumſtances of it in an exact balance;) I ſay, who can tell, but that in ſuch a caſe as I have mentioned, God may graciouſly be pleaſed to accept ſuch a degree of conſtant ſuffering of great torments for ſo long a time, for a true martyrdom, and not expect a more than human patience and

and reſolution, where he is not pleaſed to afford more than human ſtrength and ſupport; and whether he may not look upon their failing and miſcarriage at laſt, in the ſame rank with the indeliberate actions of men in a frenzy, and beſides themſelves?

And thus God may be ſaid *with the temptation to make a way to eſcape*, or to give a happy iſſue to it; ſince they were enabled to bear it, till being diſtracted by their tormients, their underſtandings were thrown off the hinges, and incapable of exerciſing any deliberate acts of reaſon. And without ſome ſuch equitable conſideration of the caſe of ſuch perſons, it will be very hard to reconcile ſome appearances of things with the goodneſs of God, and the faithfulneſs of his promiſe.

However, it will become us to abſtain from all uncharitableneſs and peremptory cenſure of the final eſtate of ſuch perſons, eſpecially till we ourſelves have given greater and better teſtimony of our conſtancy; and in the mean time, to leave them to the righteous and merciful ſentence of their maſter and ours, to whoſe judgment we muſt all ſtand or fall.

I am ſure, it will very ill become thoſe, who by the providence of God have eſcaped thoſe ſufferings, and are at preſent out of danger themſelves, to ſit in judgment upon thoſe who are left to endure this terrible conflict, and have perhaps held out as long, or longer, than they themſelves would have done in the like circumſtances. Let us rather earneſtly beg of *the God of all grace and patience*, that he would endue us with a greater meaſure of patience and conſtancy, if he ſee fit to call us to the exerciſe of it, and (which we lawfully may, after the example of our bleſſed Saviour) *that if it be his will, he would let this cup paſs from us*, and not try us with the like ſufferings, *leſt we alſo be weary and faint in our minds.* I come now to the

III. And laſt enquiry which I propoſed; What ground and reaſon there is, for good men to expect the more peculiar and eſpecial care of God's providence in caſe of ſuch ſufferings.

The providence of God extends to all his creatures, ac-

according to that of the Pſalmiſt, *the Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.* But he exerciſeth a more particular providence towards mankind; and more peculiar yet towards thoſe who ſtudy to pleaſe him, by obeying his laws and doing his will. He that is aſſured of his own heart, that he loves God, and would do or ſuffer any thing for him, can have no cauſe to doubt but that God loves him, and is concerned for his happineſs. No man was ever afraid of God, that was not conſcious to himſelf that he had offended him, and by the wilful breach of his laws had put himſelf out of the care of his providence. But on the contrary, if our hearts give us this teſtimony, that we have made it our ſincere endeavour to pleaſe him, we are naturally apt to have good aſſurance and confidence of his favour and good-will towards us. This comfort the mind of every good man is apt to give him, from his own reaſon, and the natural notions which he hath of God.

But to free us from all doubt in this matter, God himſelf hath told us ſo, and given us plentiful aſſurance of it in his word, Pſal. xi. 7. *The righteous Lord loveth righteouſneſs, his countenance doth behold the upright*; that is, he will be favourable unto them. Pſal. xxxiii. 18. *Behold the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him; upon them that hope in his mercy.* The *eye of God* ſignifies his watchful care and providence over good men. So that beſides the firm and well-grounded reaſonings, from the eſſential perfections of the divine nature, the mercy and goodneſs of God; *we have a more ſure word of promiſe*, in the expreſs declarations of God's word, and more particularly in the caſe of great temptations and ſufferings. For can we think, that the ſcripture ſaith in vain, *Wait on the Lord, and be of good courage, and he ſhall ſtrengthen thine heart? Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of all? The ſteps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and he delighteth in his ways; though he fall, he ſhall not utterly be caſt down, for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand? The ſalvation of the righteous cometh of the Lord, he is their help in time*

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of trouble? The ſame promiſes we find in the New Teſtament. *All things ſhall work together for good to them that love God. God is faithful who hath promiſed, that he will not ſuffer you to be tempted above what ye are able, but will with the temptation make a way to eſcape.* And to mention no more; *hold faſt the profeſſion of your faith without wavering, he is faithful that hath promiſed, viz.* to ſupport you under ſufferings, and to reward them.

Thus much for the *firſt* point, namely, that when men do ſuffer truly for the cauſe of religion, they may with confidence commit themſelves to the more peculiar care of the divine providence.

SERMON C.

The ſupport of good men, under their ſufferings for religion.

1 PETER iv. 19.

Wherefore let them that ſuffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their ſouls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.

The ſecond ſermon on this text.

FRom theſe words I propoſed to conſider theſe three points:

Firſt, That when men do ſuffer really and truly for the cauſe of religion, they may with confidence commit themſelves (their lives, and all that is dear to them) to the peculiar and more eſpecial care of the divine providence.

Secondly, This we may do always, provided that we be careful of our duty, and do what is required on our part; and that neither to avoid ſufferings, nor to reſcue ourſelves out of them, we do any thing contrary to our duty and a good conſcience; for this

this is the meaning of *committing ourſelves to God in well-doing.*

Thirdly, To ſhew what ground of comfort and encouragement the conſideration of God, under the notion of a faithful Creator, does afford to us, under all our ſufferings for a good cauſe and a good conſcience.

The *firſt* of theſe points I have treated on at large in my former diſcourſe. I proceed now to the

Second, Namely, when in all our ſufferings for the cauſe of religion, we may with confidence and good aſſurance, commit ourſelves to the peculiar and more eſpecial care of God's providence; this is to be underſtood, always provided that we be careful of our duty, and do what is required on our part; and that neither to avoid ſufferings, nor to reſcue ourſelves out of them, we do any thing contrary to our duty and a good conſcience. And this I told you was the meaning of *committing ourſelves to God in well-doing*; for if we either neglect our duty, or ſtep out of the way of it, by doing things contrary to it, the providence of God will not be concerned to bear us out in ſuch ſufferings. So that in our ſufferings for the cauſe of God and religion, *to commit ourſelves to him in well-doing,* may reaſonably comprehend in it theſe following particulars:

1. Provided always, that we neglect no lawful means of our preſervation from ſufferings or our deliverance out of them. In this caſe men do not commit themſelves to the providence of God, but caſt themſelves out of his care and protection; they do not truſt God, but tempt him, and do as it were try whether he will ſtand by us, when we deſert ourſelves, and bring us out of trouble, when we would take no care, would uſe no endeavours to prevent it. If we will needleſly provoke trouble, and run ourſelves upon ſuffering; if we will neglect ourſelves, and the lawful means of our preſervation; if we will give up, and part with thoſe ſecurities of our religion, which the providence of God, and the laws of our country have given us; if we ourſelves will help to pull down the fence which is about us; if we will diſarm

diſarm ourſelves, and by our own act expoſe ourſelves naked and open to danger and ſufferings; why ſhould we think in this caſe, that God will help us, when we would not help ourſelves by thoſe lawful ways which the providence of God hath put into our hands?

All truſt in God, and dependence upon his providence, does imply, that we join prayer and endeavour together; faith in God, and a prudent and diligent uſe of means: If we lazily truſt the providence of God, and ſo *caſt all our care upon him*, as to take none at all ourſelves, God will take no care of us. In vain do we rely upon the wiſdom and goodneſs, and power of God; in vain do we importune, and tire heaven with our prayers, to help us againſt our enemies and perſecutors, if we ourſelves will do nothing for ourſelves: In vain do we hope that God will maintain and defend our religion againſt all the ſecret contrivances and open aſſaults of our enemies, if we, who are united in the profeſſion of the ſame religion, and in all the eſſentials of faith and worſhip, will for ſome ſmall differences in leſſer matters, which are of no moment, in compariſon of the things wherein we are agreed: I ſay, if for ſuch ſlight matters, we will divide and fall out among ourſelves; if when the enemy is at the gates, we will ſtill purſue our heats and animoſities, and will madly keep open thoſe breaches, which were fooliſhly made at firſt; what can we expect, but that the common enemy ſhould take the advantage, and enter in at them; and whilſt we are ſo unſeaſonably and ſenſeleſly contending with one another, that they ſhould take the opportunity which we give them to deſtroy us all.

2. Provided likewiſe that we do not attempt our preſervation or deliverance from ſuffering, by evil and unlawful means: We muſt do nothing that is contrary to our duty, and to a good conſcience; nor comply with any thing, or lend our helping hand thereto, that apparently tends to the ruin of our religion, neither to divert nor put off ſufferings for the preſent, nor to reſcue ourſelves from under them;

becauſe we cannot with confidence commit ourſelves to the providence of God, but in well-doing.

This is an eternal rule, from whence we muſt in no caſe depart, *that men muſt do nothing contrary to the rules and precepts of religion, no, not for the ſake of religion itſelf:* We muſt not break any law of God, nor diſobey the lawful commands of lawful authority, to free ourſelves from any ſufferings whatſoever; becauſe the goodneſs of no end can ſanctify evil means, and make them lawful: We muſt not *ſpeak deceitfully for God,* nor *lie,* no, not *for the truth*; nor *kill men,* though we could thereby *do God and religion the greateſt ſervice.* And though all the caſuiſts in the world ſhould teach the contrary doctrine (as they generally do in the church of Rome) yet I would not doubt to oppoſe to all thoſe, the ſingle authority of St. Paul, who expreſly condemns this principle, and brands it for a damnable doctrine, *that evil may be done by us that good may come.* Rom. iii. 8. *And not as we be ſlanderouſly reported, and as ſome affirm that we ſay, let us do evil that good may come, whoſe damnation is juſt.* St. Paul, it ſeems, looked upon it as a moſt deviliſh calumny, to inſinuate that the Chriſtian religion gives the leaſt countenance to ſuch damnable doctrines and doings as theſe; and pronounceth their *damnation to be juſt,* who either teach any ſuch principle, as the doctrine of Chriſtianity, or practiſe according to it.

Let thoſe look to it, who teach, that a right intention, and a good end, will render things, which are otherwiſe evil and unlawful, not only lawful to be done by us, but in many caſes meritorious; eſpecially where the good of the church, and the extirpation of hereſy are more immediately concerned. Of this nature are the doctrines of equivocation and mental reſervation, and the lawfulneſs of ſuch artificial ways of lying, to avoid the danger of the law, when they are brought before heretical magiſtrates; and this is the common doctrine of the moſt learned caſuiſts of all orders in the church of Rome. And ſuch likewiſe are their doctrines, of the lawfulneſs of extirpating hereticks, by the moſt barbarous and bloody

bloody means, and of breaking faith with them, though given by Emperors and Princes, in the moſt publick and ſolemn manner, both which are the avowed doctrines of their general councils, and have frequently been put in practice, to the deſtruction of many millions of Chriſtians, better and more righteous than themſelves. *But we have not ſo learned Chriſt, who have heard him, and been taught by him as the truth is in Jeſus.* They who are rightly inſtructed in the Chriſtian religion, are ſo far from thinking it lawful to do any thing that is evil, to bring others under ſuffering, that they do not allow it in any caſe whatſoever, no, not for the cauſe of God and religion, and to free themſelves from the greateſt ſufferings that can be inflicted upon them.

3. Provided alſo, that we do truſt the providence of God, and do indeed commit ourſelves to it; relying upon his wiſdom and goodneſs, and entirely ſubmitting and reſigning up ourſelves to his will and diſpoſal, both as to the degree and the duration of our ſufferings; believing that he will do that for us which upon the whole matter, and in the final iſſue and reſult of things, will be beſt for us. That bleſſing, wherewith Moſes the man of God bleſſed the people of Iſrael before his death, doth belong to good men in all ages: *he loveth his people,* and *all his ſaints are in his hand,* Deut. xxxiii. 3. Innumerable are the promiſes in ſcripture concerning the merciful providence and goodneſs of God, towards thoſe *who truſt in him, and hope in his mercy,* Pſal. xxxii. 10. *Many ſorrows ſhall be to the wicked: but he that truſteth in the Lord, mercy ſhall compaſs him about.* Pſal. xxxiii. 18, 19, 20, 21, 22. *Behold the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him; upon them that hope in his mercy: to deliver their ſoul from death, and to keep them alive in famine. Our ſoul waiteth for the Lord: he is our help and our ſhield. For our heart ſhall rejoice in him: becauſe we have truſted in his holy name. Let thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us, according as we hope in thee.* Pſal. xxxiv. 22. *The Lord redeemeth the ſoul of his ſervants: and none of them that truſt in him ſhall be deſolate.* Pſal. xxxvii.

39, 40. *But the ſalvation of the righteous is of the Lord, he is their ſtrength in the time of trouble. And the Lord ſhall help them and deliver them: he ſhall deliver them from the wicked, and ſave them becauſe they truſt in him.* Pſal. xxxi. 19. *O how great is thy goodneſs, which thou haſt laid up for them that fear thee; which thou haſt wrought for them that truſt in thee before the ſons of men!* Pſal. lv. 22. *Caſt thy burden upon the Lord, and he ſhall ſuſtain thee: he ſhall never ſuffer the righteous to be moved.* Pſal. cxxv. 1. *They that truſt in the Lord ſhall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever.* Iſa. xxvi. 3, 4. *Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whoſe mind is ſtaid on thee, becauſe he truſteth in thee. Truſt ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlaſting ſtrength.*

4. Provided yet further, that we pray earneſtly to God for his gracious help and aſſiſtance, for his merciful comfort and ſupport under ſufferings; that he would be pleaſed to ſtrengthen our faith, and to increaſe and lengthen out our patience, in proportion to the degree and duration of our ſufferings.

All the promiſes which God hath made to us are upon this condition, that we earneſtly ſeek and ſue to him for the benefit and bleſſing of them, Pſal. l. 15. *Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou ſhalt glorify me.* Ezek. xxxvi. 37. After a great deliverance, and many bleſſings promiſed to them, this condition is at laſt added, *Thus ſaith the Lord God, I will yet for this be enquired of by the houſe of Iſrael, to do it for them.* And this likewiſe is the tenor of the promiſes of the New Teſtament, Matth. vii. 7. *Ask, and it ſhall be given you; ſeek, and ye ſhall find: knock, and it ſhall be opened unto you.* And in this very caſe that I am ſpeaking of, God expects that we ſhould apply ourſelves to him for ſpiritual wiſdom and grace to behave ourſelves under ſufferings as we ought, Jam. i. 2, 3, 4. where ſpeaking of the manifold temptations that Chriſtians would be exerciſed withal, he directs them to pray to God for wiſdom to demean themſelves under perſecutions, with patience, and conſtancy and

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chearfulneſs, *My brethren, account it all joy, when ye fall into divers temptations*; (meaning the temptations and trials of ſuffering in ſeveral kinds) *knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have its perfect work.* And becauſe this is a very difficult duty, and requires a great deal of ſpiritual skill, to demean our ſelves under ſufferings as we ought, therefore he adds in the next words: *If any of you lack wiſdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it ſhall be given him.*

And this earneſt application we are to make to God, for his grace and ſeaſonable help in time of need; not to put him in mind of his promiſe, but to teſtify our dependence upon him, and expectation of all good from him. And we muſt likewiſe uſe great importunity in our prayers to God, to aſſiſt us and ſtand by us in the day of trial, and the hour of temptation. And therefore our Saviour heaps up ſeveral words, to denote the great earneſtneſs and importunity which we ought to uſe in prayer, bidding us to *ask*, and *ſeek*, and *knock*. And to ſhew that he lays more than ordinary weight upon this matter, and to encourage our importunity, he ſpake two ſeveral parables to this purpoſe; the firſt, Luke xi. 5. of the man, who by mere importunity prevailed with his friend to riſe at midnight to do him a kindneſs, which our Saviour applies to encourage our importunity in prayer, ver. 9. *And I ſay unto you, ask, and it ſhall be given you; ſeek, and ye ſhall find; knock, and it ſhall be opened unto you.* The other is the parable of the importunate widow and unjuſt judge, related by the ſame evangeliſt, Luke xviii. 1. with this preface to it; and *he ſpake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray and not to faint.* And to ſpeak the truth, they ſeem at firſt ſight two of the oddeſt of all our Saviour's parables, as if the deſign of them were to inſinuate to us, that God is to be prevailed upon by the mere importunity of our prayers to grant our requeſts: But our bleſſed Saviour, who beſt knew his own meaning, tells us, that all that he deſigned by it, was

only to ſignify, *that we ought always to pray, and not to faint*, that is, to continue inſtant in prayer, and not to give over after once asking, as if we deſpaired of prevailing. Not that mere importunity prevails with God to give us thoſe things which he is otherwiſe unwilling to grant; but becauſe it becomes us to be fervent, and earneſt, to teſtify our faith and confidence in the goodneſs of God, and the deep ſenſe we have of our own weakneſs and wants, and unworthineſs; and likewiſe that we ſet a true value upon the bleſſings and favours of God, as worth all the earneſtneſs and importunity we can uſe: And in this decent and ſober ſenſe, the ſucceſs of our prayers may truly be ſaid to depend upon our importunity; not that it is neceſſary to move God to grant our requeſts, but that it becomes us to be thus affected, that we may be the more fitly qualified for the grace and mercy which God is willing to confer upon us.

I have been the longer upon this, to give us a right notion of this matter, and that we may the more diſtinctly underſtand the true reaſon why our Saviour does require ſo much earneſtneſs and importunity of prayer upon our part; not at all to work upon God, and to diſpoſe him to ſhew mercy to us (for that he is always inclinable to, whenever we are fit for it) but only to diſpoſe and qualify us to receive the grace and mercy of God, with greater advantage to ourſelves.

5. Provided moreover, that we be not confident of ourſelves, and of the force and ſtrength of our own reſolution. We know not ourſelves, nor the frailty and weakneſs of our own reſolution, till we are tried. It is wiſe advice which Solomon gives us, and never more ſeaſonable than in the day of trial, Prov. iii. 5, 6, 7. *Truſt in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own underſtanding; in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he ſhall direct thy paths; be not wiſe in thine own eyes*; that is, be not conceited and confident of thine own wiſdom and ſtrength, or ability in any kind; there is a ſecret providence of God, which mingles itſelf with the actions

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and ſpirits of men, and diſpoſeth of us unknown to ourſelves; and what we think to be the effect of our own ſtrength and reſolution, of our own wiſdom and contrivance, proceeds from an higher cauſe, which, unſeen to us, does ſteer and govern us. So the wiſe man obſerves, Prov. xx. 24. *Man's goings are of the Lord, how can a man then underſtand his own ways?* And therefore we have reaſon every one to ſay with the Prophet, Jer. x. 23. *O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himſelf, it is not in man that walketh to direct his ſteps.* Our *feet* will ſoon *ſlip*, if God do not *uphold us by his hand.* Remember how ſhamefully the chief of our Lord's diſciples miſcarried, by too much confidence in himſelf, I mean St. Peter; in whoſe fall we may all ſee our own frailty; if God do but permit the devil to have the winnowing of us, there will be a great deal of chaff found in the beſt of us. What St. Paul ſaid of himſelf, 2 Cor. xii. 10. *When I am weak, then am I ſtrong*, we ſhall all find true, when it comes to the trial; we are then ſtrongeſt, when, in a juſt ſenſe of our own weakneſs, we rely moſt upon the ſtrength and power of God.

6. Provided furthermore, that according to our ability, we have been much in the exerciſe of alms and charity. For well-doing, or doing good, is ſometimes taken in a narrower ſenſe, not improper here to be mentioned, though perhaps not ſo particularly intended here in the text, for works of charity and alms. As Heb. xiii. 16. *But to do good, and to communicate* (that is, to the neceſſities of the poor) *forget not, for with ſuch ſacrifices God is well pleaſed.* This kind of well-doing is a ſpecial preſervative in times of evil; there is no kind of grace or virtue, to which there are in ſcripture more ſpecial promiſes made of our protection and preſervation from evil and ſuffering, of ſupport and comfort under them, and deliverance out of them, than to this of a charitable and compaſſionate conſideration of thoſe who labour under want or ſuffering. Pſal. xxxvii. 3. *Truſt in the Lord, and do good, ſo ſhalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou ſhalt be fed.*

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And ver. 19. ſpeaking of righteous or merciful men, *they ſhall not be aſhamed in the evil time, and in the days of famine they ſhall be ſatisfied.* Pſalm xli. 1, 2. *Bleſſed is he that conſidereth the poor, the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble; the Lord will preſerve him, and keep him alive, and he ſhall be bleſſed upon the earth*; and *thou wilt not deliver him unto the will of his enemies.*

There are likewiſe in the apocryphal books excellent ſayings for the encouragement of charity, as that which will be particularly conſidered and rewarded to us in the times of danger and diſtreſs, in the days of affliction and ſuffering, Tob. iv. 7, 8, 9, 10. *Give alms of thy ſubſtance, and turn not thy face from any poor man, and the face of God ſhall not be turned away from thee. If thou haſt abundance, give alms accordingly; if thou haſt but a little, be not afraid to give according to that little; for thou layeſt up for thyſelf a good treaſure againſt the day of neceſſity, becauſe that alms do deliver from death, and ſuffereth not to come into darkneſs.* Eccluſ. iii. 31. ſpeaking of him that gives alms, and is ready to do kindneſs to others; *He is mindful of that which may come hereafter; and when he falleth he ſhall find a ſtay.* And chap. xxix. 11, 12, 13. *Lay up thy treaſure according to the commandment of the Moſt High, and it ſhall bring thee more profit than gold; ſhut up alms in thy ſtore-houſes, and it ſhall deliver thee from all affliction, it ſhall fight for thee againſt thine enemies, better than a mighty ſhield, and a ſtrong ſpear.*

I have often ſaid it, and am verily perſuaded of it, that one of the beſt ſigns of God's mercy and favour to this poor nation, is, that God hath been pleaſed of late years to ſtir up ſo general a diſpoſition in men to works of alms and charity, and thereby to revive the primitive ſpirit of Chriſtianity, which ſo eminently *abounded in this grace*, and taught *thoſe who believed in God, to be careful to maintain* and practiſe *good works.* And nothing gives me greater hopes that God hath mercy ſtill in ſtore for us, than that men are ſo ready to ſhew mercy. There are great objects

objects to exerciſe our charity upon in this time of the general ſuſpenſion of trade and buſineſs, from an apprehenſion of approaching troubles; by reaſon whereof, both the numbers and neceſſities of our poor are greatly and daily increaſed among us; and beſides the poor of our own nation, God hath ſent us great numbers from abroad, I mean thoſe who are fled hither for ſhelter, from that violent ſtorm of perſecution which hath lately fallen upon them for the cauſe of our common religion. According to the compaſſion we ſhew to them, we may expect that God will either preſerve us from the like ſufferings, or graciouſly ſupport us under them. What do we know, but that God is now trying us, and hath purpoſely put this opportunity into our hands, of preventing, or mitigating, or ſhortening our own ſufferings, according as we extend our charity and pity to thoſe who have ſuffered ſo deeply for the cauſe of God, and his truth?

7. Provided in the laſt place, and above all, that we be ſincere in our religion, and endeavour to be univerſally good, and *holy in all manner of converſation*, and to *abound in all the fruits of righteouſneſs, which are by Jeſus Chriſt, to the praiſe and glory of God.* This is the largeſt ſenſe of well-doing, and the moſt neceſſary of all the reſt, to prepare us for ſufferings, and to give us courage and conſtancy under them; and likewiſe to engage the providence of God to a tender care of us, and concernment for us, if he ſhall ſee it fit to bring us into a ſtate of ſuffering.

But if we live in open contempt and violation of God's laws, if we make no conſcience of our ways and actions, we cannot poſſibly have any well-grounded truſt and confidence in God, for *he hates all the workers of iniquity*, and his providence ſets itſelf againſt them for evil. Bad men draw many miſchiefs and inconveniencies upon themſelves, as the natural conſequences of their actions; but beſides this, the vengeance of God haunts and purſues evil-doers, and his juſt providence many times involves them in many difficulties and dangers, beſides and beyond the natural courſe of things: *Upon the*

the wicked (ſays *David*) *he will rain ſnares:* So that as ever we expect the comfortable effects of the divine care and providence, we muſt live in a dutiful obedience to God's holy will and laws.

Bad men may make a profeſſion of the true religion, and may in ſome ſort believe it, though they do not live according to it; and yet perhaps for all this, out of a mere generoſity and obſtinacy of mind, they cannot bear to be threatned and terrified out of the profeſſion of the truth; and will endure a great deal of trouble and inconveniencies, before they will renounce it; knowing themſelves to be ſo far in the right that they ſtand for the truth, and hoping perhaps thereby to make ſome amends for their bad practice. But when all is done, nothing gives a man true courage and reſolution, like the teſtimony of our own hearts, concerning our own ſincerity, and the conſcience of well-doing. And on the contrary, he that hath not the reſolution and patience to mortify his luſts, and to reſtrain his appetites, and to ſubdue his irregular paſſions for the ſake of God and religion, will not eaſily bring himſelf to ſubmit to great ſufferings upon that account. There is conſiderable difficulty in the practice of religion, and the reſolute courſe of a holy life; but ſurely it is much eaſier to live as religion requires we ſhould do, than to lay down our lives for it; and (as I have told you upon another occaſion) he that cannot prevail with himſelf to live a ſaint, will much more hardly be perſuaded to dy a martyr. I proceed to the

Third point, namely, what ground of comfort and encouragement the conſideration of God, under the notion of *a faithful Creator*, does afford to us under all our ſuffering for a good conſcience and a good cauſe. *Let them that ſuffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their ſouls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.* And in this I ſhall be very brief.

And this is a firm ground of comfort and encouragement to us, under all our ſufferings for God, to conſider him as the author of our beings, or, as it is

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expreſſed in the text, *as a faithful Creator*; one that is not fickle and inconſtant in his affection and kindneſs to his creatures; but is true to his own deſign, and will not abandon and forſake the work of his own hands: So great a benefit as that of our beings, freely conferred upon us, is but an earneſt of God's further kindneſs to us, and future care of us; if by our ill carriage towards him, we do not render ourſelves unworthy and incapable of it. That we are God's creatures, is a demonſtration that he hath a kindneſs for us: If he had not, he would never have made us; as it is excellently ſaid in the Wiſdom of Solomon, chap. xi. 23, 24. *Thou haſt mercy upon all, for thou loveſt all the things that are, and abhorreſt nothing which thou haſt made: For never wouldſt thou have made any thing, if thou hadſt hated it.* And ver. 26. *Thou ſpareſt all, for they are thine, O Lord, thou lover of ſouls.*

To whom then may we with ſo much confidence commit ourſelves, as to him who freely gave us our being? From whom may we expect ſo tender a regard and conſideration of our caſe, and all the circumſtances of it, as from this great founder and benefactor? For he that made us *knows our frame*, and whereof we are made, and how much we are able to bear; he conſiders our ſtrength, or rather our weakneſs, and what courage and reſolution he hath endued us withal, and what comfort and ſupport we ſtand in need of in the day of tribulation. And as they who make armour, are wont to try that which they think to be good and well tempered with a ſtronger charge, not to break and hurt it, but to prove and praiſe it: So God exerciſeth thoſe whom he hath fitted and tempered for it, with manifold temptations, *that the trial of your faith*, as St. Peter expreſſeth it, 1 Pet. i. 7. *being much more precious than of gold tried in the fire, may be found unto praiſe, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jeſus Chriſt.*

So that this conſideration that we are God's creatures, does (as I may ſay) oblige him in faithfulneſs to his own act, and in conſequence of his bring-

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ing us into being at firſt, to be concerned for us afterwards, ſo as never to abandon us, nor quite to take away his loving-kindneſs and mercy from us; till we are good for nothing, and do in a manner ceaſe to be what he made us, that is, reaſonable creatures. A perſon or people muſt have proceeded to the utmoſt degree of degeneracy, when God will conſider them no longer as his creatures, nor ſhew any pity or favour to them; things muſt be come to extremity, when God deals thus with us, as he threatned the people of Iſrael, Iſa. xxvii. 11. *When the boughs are withered, they ſhall be broken off, and ſet on fire; for it is a people of no underſtanding: Therefore he that made them, will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them, will ſhew them no favour.*

And now I have done with the three points which I propoſed to handle from this text, and the diſcourſe which I have made upon them, does all along apply itſelf, by directing us how we ought to commit ourſelves to the providence of God, in all caſes of danger and ſuffering, eſpecially for the cauſe of God, and his truth, *viz.* in the faithful diſcharge of our duty and a good conſcience, and by a firm truſt and confidence in the wiſdom and goodneſs of the divine providence; not doubting but that *he who made us, and knows our frame,* will have a tender care of us, and *not ſuffer us to be tempted above what we are able.*

And as to our preſent danger, and that terrible ſtorm which threatens us, let us pray to God, if it be his will, to divert it; but if otherways he hath determined, to fit and prepare us for it. And let us be fervent and earneſt in our prayers to him, not that he is moved by our importunity, but that we may thereby be qualified and made fit to receive the mercy which we beg of him.

And let us take this occaſion to do that which we ſhould have done without it, *to break off our ſins by repentance, and to turn every one of us from the evil of our ways*; that hereby we may render God propitious to us, and put ourſelves under the more immediate

diate care and protection of his providence, that we may prevent his judgments, and turn away his wrath and diſpleaſure from us, as he did once from a great and ſinful city and people, upon their ſincere humiliation and repentance, Jonah iii. 10. where it is ſaid of the people of Nineveh, that *God ſaw their works, that they turned from their evil way, and God repented of the evil that he had ſaid that he would do unto them, and he did it not.* Above all, let us be ſincere in the profeſſion of our religion, and conſcientious in the practice of it; nothing will bear us up under great trials and ſufferings, like *the teſtimony of a good conſcience, void of offence towards God and towards men.*

I will conclude this whole diſcourſe with thoſe apoſtolical bleſſings and prayers, Col. i. 10, 11. *That ye may walk worthy of the Lord, unto all pleaſing, being fruitful in every good work, ſtrengthened with all might according to his glorious power, unto all patience, and long-ſuffering, with joyfulneſs.* And 2 Theſſ. ii. 16, 17. *Now our Lord Jeſus Chriſt himſelf, and God even our Father, who hath loved us, and hath given us everlaſting conſolation, and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and ſtabliſh you in every good word and work. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever.* Amen.

SERMON CI.

Of the work aſſigned to every man, and the ſeaſon for doing it.

JOHN ix. 4.

I muſt work the works of him that ſent me, while it is day: The night cometh, when no man can work.

THESE words our bleſſed Saviour ſpake of himſelf, whilſt he was upon earth; in which he tells us, that he was ſent by God into the world, and had a certain work and employment appointed him during his abode in it. A great work indeed! to inſtruct, to reform, and ſave mankind. A work of great labour, and pains, and patience, not to be done in a ſhort time; and yet the time for doing it was not long: after he came into the world, it was a good while before he began it; and after he began it, the time of working was not long before the night came, and put an end to it: *I muſt work the works of him that ſent me, while it is day: The night cometh, when no man can work.*

But that which our Saviour here ſpeaks of himſelf, and which properly belongs to him and no other, may yet be accommodated to every man, with ſome allowance for the difference and diſproportion. For though every man be not ſent by God into the world after ſo peculiar a manner, and upon ſo particular and vaſt a deſign; yet upon a general account, every man is ſent by God into this world, and hath a work given him to do in it, which he is concerned vigorouſly to mind and to proſecute with all his might. And though every man be not ſent to ſave the whole world, as the Son of God was, yet every man is ſent by God into the world, *to work out his own ſalvation*, and to take care of that in the

the firſt place, and then to promote the ſalvation of others, as much as in him lies. So that every one of us may, in a very good ſenſe, accommodate theſe words of our Saviour to himſelf, *I muſt work the works of him that ſent me, while it is day: The night cometh, when no man can work.*

I ſhall therefore at this time take the liberty to handle theſe words according to this moral accommodation of them, and apply what our Saviour here ſays of himſelf, to every man that cometh into the world: And this I ſhall do, by ſhewing theſe three things:

Firſt, That every man hath a work aſſigned him to do in this world, by him that ſent him into it; and may in ſome ſenſe ſay, as our bleſſed Saviour did of himſelf, *I muſt work the works of him that ſent me.*

Secondly, That there is a certain and limited time for every man to do this work in. *While it is day.*

Thirdly, That after this ſeaſon is expired, there will be no further opportunity of working. *The night cometh, when no man can work.*

Firſt, Every man hath a work aſſigned him to do in this world, by him that ſent him into it, and may in ſome ſenſe ſay, as our bleſſed Saviour did of himſelf, *I muſt work the works of him that ſent me.* God who made man a reaſonable creature, and hath endued him with faculties whereby he is capable of knowing and ſerving him, hath appointed him a work and ſervice ſuitable to theſe faculties: And having infuſed an immortal ſoul into this earthy body, hath certainly deſigned him for a ſtate beyond this life, in which he ſhall be for ever happy or miſerable, according as he uſeth and demeans himſelf in this world.

So that the work which every one of us hath to do in this world, is to prepare and fit ourſelves for that eternal duration which remains for us after death. For the life which we live now in this world, is a time of exerciſe, a ſhort ſtate of probation and trial, in order to a durable and endleſs ſtate, in which we ſhall be immutably fixed in another world.

This world, into which we are now ſent for a little while, is as it were God's ſchool, in which immortal ſpirits cloathed with fleſh, are trained and bred up for eternity: And therefore the beſt, the only ſure way to be happy for ever, is, ſo to improve the ſhort and uncertain time of this life, that we may approve ourſelves to God in this world, and enjoy him in the next: Or (as St. Paul expreſſeth it) *that having our fruit unto holineſs, our end may be everlaſting life.*

And this work conſiſts in theſe three things:

I. In the care of our own ſalvation.

II. In doing what we can to promote the ſalvation of others.

III. And in order to both theſe, in the careful improvement and good husbandry of our time.

I. In the care of our own ſalvation. And this conſiſts in two things,

1. In the worſhip of Almighty God.

2. In the careful and conſcientious practice and obedience of his holy laws.

1. The care of our own ſalvation conſiſts in the pious and devout worſhip of Almighty God; that we honour him, and pay him that honour and reſpect, which is due from creatures to him that made them, and is the great Sovereign and Judge of the world; that we have an inward reverence and eſteem of him, and that we expreſs this by all ſolemn external acknowledgments of him; as by praying to him for the ſupply of our wants; by praiſing him for all the bleſſings and benefits which we have received at his hands; and that we ſet apart conſtant and ſolemn times for the performance of theſe duties; and then when we are employed in them, we be ſerious and hearty, and attentive to what we are about, and perform every part of divine worſhip with thoſe circumſtances of reverence and reſpect, which may teſtify our awful ſenſe of the divine majeſty, and our inward and profound veneration of him with whom we have to do: And this is that which is directly and properly religion.

2. This

2. This care of our own ſalvation does conſiſt likewiſe in the conſcientious and conſtant obedience and practice of God's holy laws, in the conformity of our lives and actions to the laws which he hath given us, whether they be natural, or written upon our hearts, or made known to us by the revelation of his word; that we govern our paſſions by reaſon, and moderate ourſelves in the uſe of ſenſual delights, ſo as not to tranſgreſs the rules of temperance and chaſtity; that we demean ourſelves towards others, and converſe with them with juſtice and fidelity, with kindneſs and charity.

Theſe are the ſum of the divine laws, and the heads of our duty towards ourſelves and others; all which are more powerfully enforced upon us by the revelation of the goſpel, and the plain promiſes and threatnings of it; the faith of Chriſt being the moſt firm and effectual principle both of piety towards God, and of univerſal obedience to all his particular commands.

And this is the great work which God hath ſent us to do in the world. So the wiſe man ſums up our duty, Eccleſ. xii. 13. *Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man.* The fear and reverence of the divine majeſty is the great foundation and principle of religion; but obedience to God's laws is the life and practice of it. God does not expect that we ſhould ſpend the greateſt part of our time in the immediate acts of religion, and in the ſolemn duties of his worſhip and ſervice; but only that we ſhould allot a fitting portion of our time to theſe, according to the circumſtances of our condition in this world, and the example of holy and good men that are in the like circumſtances with ourſelves. For ſuch is the goodneſs of God, that he does not only allow us to provide for the neceſſaries and conveniencies of this life; but hath made it our duty ſo to do. It is one of the precepts of the goſpel, which the Apoſtle chargeth the Biſhops and Teachers of the goſpel to inculcate frequently upon Chriſtians, *that they which have believed in God, ſhould be careful to maintain good works*; that is, to

employ themſelves in the works of an honeſt calling, for neceſſary uſes; that is, for the ſupport of their familes, and the relief of thoſe who are in want and neceſſity. And the Apoſtle lays great weight and ſtreſs upon this, as a very great duty, Tit. iii. 8. *This is a faithful ſaying, and theſe things I will that thou affirm conſtantly, that they which have believed in God, might be careful to maintain good works. Theſe things are good and profitable unto men*; that is, of general benefit and advantage to mankind.

So that no man's calling is a hindrance to religion, but a part of it; and by performing the duties of piety in their proper ſeaſons, and ſpending the reſt of our time in any honeſt and uſeful employment, we may make our whole life a perpetual ſerving of God; we may glorify God in our eating and drinking, and in all other lawful and uſeful actions of life. In ſerving the occaſions and neceſſities of life, with ſobriety and temperance, and in managing our worldly commerce with juſtice and integrity, we may ſerve God, and perform conſiderable duties of religion.

So that provided we do nothing that is ſinful, and manage the actions and concernments of this life with a due regard and ſubſerviency to the great intereſts of eternity, we may do the work of God all the while we are providing for ourſelves, and employed in the works of an honeſt calling: For God, who hath deſigned this life, in order to the other, conſiders the neceſſities of our preſent ſtate, and allows us to make proviſion for it.

There are ſome perſons indeed, whoſe birth and condition ſets them above the common employments of life, and the works of an ordinary calling; but theſe alſo have a work given them to do; for God hath ſent no man into the world to no purpoſe, and only to take his paſtime therein; *neque enim ita generati ſumus à natura, ut ad ludum & jocum facti eſſe videamur; ſed ad ſeveritatem potiùs, & quædam ſtudia graviora atque majora*: "For we are not (ſays "*Tully de off. lib.* 1.) ſo framed by nature, as if "we were made for ſport and jeſt, but for more ſe-"rious employments, and for greater and weightier "bu-

" buſineſs ;" and thoſe who are tied to no particular calling, may allow ſo much larger portions of their time to religion, and the ſervice of God ; and God likewiſe expects from them, that they ſhould be uſeful to mankind in ſome higher and nobler way, according to the publickneſs of their ſtation and influence. Such perſons may be ſerviceable to their country, and the affairs of government, and in the care of publick juſtice, and may employ their time in preparing and rendering themſelves more fit for this ſervice. They may find a great deal of work to do in the good government of their families, and in the prudent care and management of their eſtates, and in reconciling differences among their neighbours, and in conſidering the neceſſities of the poor, and providing for their ſupply.

So that beſides the proper work of religion, and the more immediate ſervice of God, every man in the world, how exempt ſoever his condition be from the common care and drudgery of human life, may find work enough wherein he may uſefully employ all his time, and provide for his own, and for the common benefit of mankind ; and God expects it as a duty from ſuch, that every man ſhould employ himſelf in ſome work or other, ſuitable to the ſtation in which God hath placed him in this world.

II. The work which God hath given us to do in the world, conſiſts in doing what we can to further and promote the ſalvation of others. This chiefly lies upon us, who are *the miniſters of God*, and *to whom the word of reconciliation is committed*. We are more eſpecially commiſſioned and appointed for this work, and are *ambaſſadors for Chriſt to beſeech men in his ſtead to be reconciled to God*. We are ſent by God in a more peculiar manner, and appointed for this very work, *to watch for mens ſouls*, and to be inſtruments and means of their eternal happineſs. And therefore we who are ſent by God in a more peculiar manner, and have this work aſſigned us to do in the world, ought to be very vigorous and induſtrious in it: and this, whether we con-

conſider the nature of our employment, or the glorious reward of it.

1. If we conſider the nature of our employment, both in reſpect of the honour and the happineſs of it. It is the moſt honourable work that mortal man can be employed in; it is the ſame in kind, and in the main end and deſign of it, with that of the bleſſed Angels; for we alſo are *miniſtring ſpirits, ſent forth by God to miniſter for the good of thoſe who ſhall be heirs of ſalvation.* We are the meſſengers and ambaſſadors of God to men, ſent to treat with them about the terms of their peace and reconciliation with God, to offer ſalvation to them, and to direct them to the beſt ways and means of procuring it. Nay, we have the honour to be employed in the very ſame work that the Son of God was, when he was upon the earth, *to ſeek and to ſave them that are loſt*; and *to call ſinners to repentance*; and to carry on that work, whereof he himſelf laid the foundation, when he was in the world. And what greater honour can be put upon the ſons of men, than to help forward that glorious deſign and undertaking of the Son of God, for the ſalvation of mankind?

And it is an employment no leſs happy than honourable; it is not to drudge about the mean and low concernments of this life, a perpetual toil and care about *what we ſhall eat and drink, and wherewithal we ſhall be cloathed*, which is the buſineſs of a worldly employment; but it is a direct and immediate *ſeeking of the kingdom of God and his righteouſneſs*, and a continual endeavour to promote theſe. It does not conſiſt in the labour of our body, and in bodily toil, but in the delightful exerciſe of our minds, about the beſt and nobleſt objects, God, heaven and eternity; in an earneſt and faithful endeavour by all wiſe ways and means to gain ſouls to God, and *to turn ſinners from the errors of their ways*, and to prevent their eternal ruin and deſtruction; and next to the procuring of our own happineſs, to be inſtrumental to the happineſs of others, which is certainly the moſt pleaſant and noble work that we can poſſibly be employed in; eſpecially if we conſider,

that

that by the very nature of our employment we do at the ſame time, and by the very ſame means, carry on both theſe deſigns, of the ſalvation of ourſelves and others. So St. Paul tells Timothy, when he exhorts him upon this very conſideration, *to give himſelf wholly* to this bleſſed work; becauſe, ſays he, *in doing this, thou ſhalt both ſave thyſelf, and them that hear thee,* 1 Tim. iv. 16. And when two of the greateſt and beſt deſigns in the world, our own happineſs, and the ſalvation of others, do ſo happily meet in one, and are jointly carried on by the ſame labour; this ought to be a great ſpur and incitement to us, to be vigorous and unwearied, and *abundant in the work of the Lord*; and a mighty encouragement to us to preach the word, *to be inſtant in ſeaſon, and out of ſeaſon,* and *to be examples to others, in word, in converſation, in charity, in ſpirit, in faith, in purity*; as St. Paul chargeth Timothy in the moſt ſolemn and awful manner, *before God and the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, who ſhall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing, and his kingdom,* 1 Tim. iv. 12. and 2 Tim. iv. 1. And then,

2. If we conſider the glorious reward of this work. If we be faithful and induſtrious in it, it will advance us to a higher degree of glory and happineſs in the other world. *They that be wiſe* (ſays the prophet, Dan. xii. 3.) *ſhall ſhine as the brightneſs of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteouſneſs, as the ſtars for ever and ever.* They that are induſtrious in this work, as they are *worthy of double honour* in this world, ſo they ſhall ſhine with a double glory and luſtre in the other.

But though this work of promoting the ſalvation of others, be chiefly incumbent upon thoſe whoſe office it is to attend upon this very thing; yet we are all of us concerned in it; according to the advantages and opportunities we have for it. Every man is concerned to help forward the ſalvation of his brother, and not to let him periſh if he can help it; and it is in every man's power to contribute ſomething to this bleſſed work of ſaving others, by ſeaſonable counſel and advice, by kind and gentle reproof, but eſpecially

ſpecially by a holy and exemplary converſation, by a ſhining virtue, which hath a ſilent power of perſuaſion, and I know not what ſecret charm and attraction to draw and allure others to the imitation of it.

III. And in order to both theſe, the ſaving of ourſelves and others, this work which God hath given us to do in the world, conſiſts in the careful uſe and good husbandry of our time; for without this, neither the one, nor the other can be promoted and carried on to any purpoſe. Time is the ſeaſon and opportunity of carrying on of any work, and for that reaſon is one of the moſt valuable things; and yet nothing is more waſtefully ſpent, and more prodigally ſquandered away by a great part of mankind than this, which, next to our immortal ſouls, is of all other things moſt precious; becauſe upon the right uſe or abuſe of our time, our eternal happineſs or miſery does depend. Men have generally ſome guard upon themſelves, as to their money and eſtates, and will not with eyes open ſuffer others to rob and deprive them of it: But we will let any body almoſt rob us of our time, and are contented to expoſe this precious treaſure to every body's rapine and extortion, and can quietly look on, whilſt men thruſt in their hands, and take it out by whole handfuls, as if it were of no greater value than ſilver was in Solomon's days, no more than *the ſtones in the ſtreet*. And yet when it is gone, all the ſilver and gold in the world cannot purchaſe and fetch back the leaſt moment of it, when perhaps we would give all the world for a very ſmall part of that time, which we parted with upon ſuch cheap and eaſy terms.

Good God! what a ſtupid and ſenſeleſs prodigality is this? do we conſider what we do, when we give away ſuch large portions of our time to our eaſe and pleaſure, to diverſion and idleneſs, or trifling and unprofitable converſation, to the making and receiving of impertinent viſits, and the uſual and almoſt inſeparable attendants thereof, ſpiteful obſervations upon them that are preſent, and ſlandering and back-

backbiting thoſe that are abſent; (for the great deſign of moſt people in viſits, is not to better one another, but to ſpy and make faults, and not to mend them; to get time off their hands, to ſhew their fine cloaths, and to recommend themſelves to the mutual contempt of one another, by a plentiful impertinence;) when we part with it by wholeſale in ſleep and dreſſings, and can ſpend whole mornings between the comb and the glaſs, and the afternoon at plays, and whole nights in gaming, or in riot, and lewdneſs, and intemperance; in all which people commonly waſte their money and their time together!

Nay, how do even the beſt of us miſplace this precious treaſure; and though we do not employ it to wicked purpoſes, and in works of iniquity, yet we do not apply it to the beſt and nobleſt uſe, to the glory of God, and the good and ſalvation of men! By thus laying out this treaſure, we might *lay up for ourſelves treaſures in heaven*, and help others on in the way thither.

Thus our bleſſed Saviour employed his precious time in *going about doing good*, in all kinds, and upon all occaſions, healing the bodies, and enlightening the minds, and ſaving the ſouls of men: This was his buſineſs, and this was his delight; it was *his meat and drink*, and his very life, he ſpent himſelf in it, and ſacrificed his eaſe, and his ſafety, and his life to theſe great ends, for which he came into the world; he conſidered the goodneſs and the greatneſs of this work, and the little time he had to do it in; which made him inceſſantly induſtrious in it, and to run the race which was ſet before him with great ſpeed, and *to work while it is day*, becauſe he knew *the night would come when no man can work*. And this brings me to the

Second thing I obſerved from the text, namely, that there is a certain and limited time for every man to do this work in; *while it is day. I muſt work the works of him that ſent me, while it is day*. And this *day* comprehends all the opportunities of our life, which will ſoon be over, and therefore had need to be well ſpent. A great part of our life is paſt before

fore the season of working begins: It is a great while before the use of our reason begins, and we come to have our senses exercised to discern between good and evil; before our understandings are ripe for the serious consideration of God and religion, and for the due care of our souls, and of the eternal concernment of another world, so that this first part of our life is in a great measure useless and unprofitable to us, in regard to our great design. For infancy and childhood are but the dawnings of this day, and no fit time to work in; and youth, which is as the morning of this day, though it is the flower of our time, and the most proper season of all other, for the remembrance of God, and the impressions of religion; yet it is usually possest by vanity and vice. The common custom and practice of the world, hath devoted this best part of our age to the worst employments, to the service of sin and of our lusts. How very few are there that lay hold of this opportunity, and employ it to the best purposes? And yet the following course of our lives doth in a great measure depend upon it: for most persons do continue and hold on in the way in which they set out at first, whether it be good or bad. And those who neglect to improve this first opportunity of their lives, do seldom recover themselves afterwards. God's grace may seize upon men in any part of their lives; but according to the most ordinary methods of it, the foundations and principles of religion and virtue are most commonly laid in a pious and virtuous education. This is the great opportunity of our lives, which settleth and fixeth most men, either in a good or bad course, and the fortune of their whole lives does usually follow it and depend upon it.

It is true indeed our day continues many times a great while longer, and we are to work while it continues; and it is never too late to begin to do well, and to enter upon a good course: But there is no such proper and advantageous season for the beginning of this work, as in our youth and tender years. *This is the accepted time, this is the day of salvation.* God's grace is then most forward and ready to assist

aſſiſt us; and we are then leaſt of all indiſpoſed for the receiving of the impreſſions of it; and the impreſſions of it do then go deepeſt into our minds, and are moſt laſting and durable. But if we neglect this opportunity, we provoke God by degrees to withdraw his grace, and to take away his Holy Spirit from us, and by degrees we ſettle in vicious habits, and are every day more and more *hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin.* It is never too late to work while the day laſts; but the ſooner we begin this work, and ſet about it in good earneſt, the eaſier we ſhall find it; if we defer it late, every ſtep will be up the hill, and againſt the grain.

Thirdly, After this ſeaſon is expired, there will be no further opportunity of working; when this day is once at an end, then *cometh the night when no man can work.* The night is a time unfit for work, when we can hardly do any thing, if we had never ſo great a mind to it; and there is ſuch a night coming upon every one of us, and wo be to us if we have our work to do when the night overtakes us.

There is uſually an evening before this night, when it will be very difficult for us, and next to impoſſible, to do this work; and this is the time of ſickneſs and old age, in which men are commonly unfit for any work; but moſt of all, that which requires the whole force and vigour of our minds, the buſineſs of religion. If we attempt this work then, we ſhall go very heartleſly about it, and do it very imperfectly, and be forced to ſlubber it over, and to huddle it up in great haſte and confuſion, and ſo as we can hardly hope that God will accept it. For how unfit are men to do any thing, when they are full of the ſenſe of their own infirmities, and life itſelf is become ſo great a burden to them, that they are hardly able to ſtand under it! How incapable ſhall we then be of doing the greateſt and moſt momentous work of our lives, when our faculties are almoſt quite ſpent and worn out, and all the powers of life are decayed in us; when our underſtandings are dark and dull, our memories frail and treacherous, and our hearts hard and *deceitful above all*

things! When ſickneſs and old age overtake us, we ſhall then find to our ſorrow, that *ſufficient for* that *day is the evil thereof*; we ſhall have need then of nothing elſe to do, but to bear our infirmities with patience and decency; and it is well if we can rally together of the broken forces of our reaſon, ſo much as may be a ſufficient guard to us againſt peeviſhneſs and diſcontent; we had need then have nothing elſe to do, but to be old and weak, to be ſick and dy.

Beſides, how can we expect that God ſhould accept of any work that we do at ſuch a time? With what face can we put off God with the dregs of our life? or how can we hope that he will be pleaſed with the ſervice of thoſe years, which we ourſelves *take no pleaſure in? if we offer the lame in ſacrifice, is it not evil? and if we offer the blind, is it not evil? Offer it now to thy governor, and ſee if he will be pleaſed with thee.*

And ſickneſs is commonly as bad a time as old age, and uſually incumbered with greater difficulties, and clog'd with more indiſpoſitions. If a violent diſtemper ſeize upon us, it many times takes away the uſe of our reaſon, and deprives us of all opportunity of conſideration; it makes us both inſenſible of the danger of our condition, and incapable of uſing the means to avoid it. And if we have neglected religion before, and have put off the great work of our life to the end of it, our opportunity is irrecoverably loſt; for there is nothing to be done in religion, when our reaſon is once departed from us, *the night is* then *come* indeed, and *darkneſs hath overtaken us*; and though we be ſtill alive, yet are we as unfit for any work, as if we were naturally dead.

And this is no ſuch rare and extraordinary caſe; for it happens to many; and every man that wilfully defers the work of religion and repentance to a dying hour, hath reaſon to fear that he ſhall be thus ſurprized in his ſin and ſecurity, and by the juſt judgment of God, deprived of all the opportunity of life and ſalvation, while he is yet in the land of the living.

But

But if God be more merciful unto us, and viſit us with ſuch a ſickneſs as leaves us the uſe of our underſtandings, yet all that we do in religion at ſuch a time, proceeds from ſo violent a cauſe, from the preſent terror of death, and the dreadful apprehenſion of that eternal miſery which is juſt ready to ſwallow us up, that it is one of the hardeſt things in the world, not only for others, but even for ourſelves, to know whether our reſolutions, and this ſudden and haſty fit of repentance be ſincere or not: For it is natural, and almoſt unavoidable, for a man to repent, and be ſorry for what he hath done when he is going to execution. But the great queſtion is, What this man would do, if his life were ſpared? whether his repentance would hold good, and he would become a new man, and change his former courſe of life, or relapſe into it again? And it is by no means certain, that he would not be as bad as he was before; becauſe we ſee many, who, when they lay upon a ſick-bed, give all imaginable teſtimony of a deep ſorrow, and a hearty repentance for their ſins, who yet upon their recovery, return to their former ſins with a greater appetite, and make themſelves *ten times more the children of wrath than they were before.* So that all the work that we can do at ſuch a time, ought not to be much reckoned upon, and can give us little or no comfort; becauſe it is ſo infinitely uncertain whether it be real and ſincere, and whether the effect of ſo violent a cauſe would laſt and continue, if the cauſe were removed. Therefore *we ſhould work while it is day*; for whatever we do in this evening of our lives, will be done with great difficulty, and with very doubtful ſucceſs.

But beſides this evening, there is *a night coming when no man can work:* Death will ſeize upon us, and then our ſtate will be irrecoverably concluded: after that it will be impoſſible for us to do any thing towards our own ſalvation, or to have any thing done for us by others; the prayers of the living will not avail the dead, *as the tree falls ſo it lies; there is no wiſdom, nor counſel, nor device in the grave whither we are going*; therefore, according to the

counſel of the wiſe man, *what our hand findeth to do, let us do it with our might.*

This counſel concerns all ages and perſons. I will apply it to the young, in the words of the wiſe preacher, Eccleſ. xii. 1. *Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou ſhalt ſay, I have no pleaſure in them.* To them who are in the vigour of their age, in the words of the Prophet, Iſa. lv. 6. *Seek the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.* And to them that are old, in the words of another Prophet, Jer. xiii. 16. *Give glory to the Lord your God, before he cauſeth darkneſs, and before your feet ſtumble upon the dark mountains, and while ye look for light, he turn it into the ſhadow of death, and make it groſs darkneſs.* And let us, every one of us, of what age or condition ſoever, apply it to ourſelves, in the words of our bleſſed Saviour here in the text, *I muſt work the works of him that ſent me, while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work.*

SERMON

SERMON CII.

Of the great duties of natural religion, with the ways and means of knowing them.

MICAH vi. 6, 7, 8.

Wherewith ſhall I come before the Lord, and bow myſelf before the high God? ſhall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old?

Will the Lord be pleaſed with thouſands of rams, or with ten thouſands of rivers of oil? ſhall I give my firſt-born for my tranſgreſſion, the fruit of my body for the ſin of my ſoul?

He hath ſhewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do juſtly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

IN the beginning of this chapter, the Prophet tells the people of Iſrael, that *the Lord had a controverſy with them*; and that he might direct them how to take up this quarrel, he brings in one making this enquiry in the name of the people; *Wherewith ſhall I come before the Lord, and bow myſelf before the high God?* That is, by what kind of worſhip or devotion may I addreſs myſelf to him in the moſt acceptable manner? by what means may I hope to appeaſe his diſpleaſure? To ſatisfy this enquiry, he firſt inſtanceth in the chief kinds of ſacrifices and expiations that were in uſe among the Jews and Heathens: *Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings?* the conſtant ſacrifice that was offered to God by way of acknowledgment of his dominion over the creatures: *with calves of a year old?* which was the ſin-offering which the high-prieſt offered for himſelf. Or will he rather accept of thoſe great and coſtly ſacrifices which were offered upon ſolemn

and publick occaſions, ſuch as that was which Solomon offered at the dedication of the Temple? *Will the Lord be pleaſed with thouſands of rams, or with ten thouſands of rivers of oil?* Or if none of theſe will do, ſhall I try to atone him after the manner of the Heathen, by the deareſt thing in the world, the firſt-born of my children? *Shall I give my firſt-born for my tranſgreſſion, the fruit of my body for the ſin of my ſoul?* If God was to be appeaſed at all, ſurely they thought it muſt be by ſome of theſe ways, for beyond theſe they could imagine nothing of greater value and efficacy.

But the Prophet tells them, that they were quite out of the way, in thinking to pacify God upon theſe terms; that there are other things which are much better and more pleaſing to him than any of theſe ſacrifices. For ſome of them were expreſly forbidden by God, as the offering up of our children; and for the reſt, they were not good in themſelves, but merely by virtue of their inſtitution, and becauſe they were commanded. But the things which he would recommend to them are ſuch as are good in their own nature, and required of us by God upon that account. *He hath ſhewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do juſtly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?*

So that in theſe words you have,

Firſt, An enquiry which is the beſt way to appeaſe God when he is offended? *Wherewith ſhall I come before the Lord, and bow myſelf before the high God?*

Secondly, The way that men are apt to take in this caſe; and that is by ſome external piece of religion and devotion; ſuch as ſacrifice was both among Jews and Heathens, *Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings*, &c. By which queſtions the Prophet intimates that men are very apt to pitch upon this courſe.

Thirdly, The courſe which God himſelf directs to, and which will effectually pacify him. *He hath ſhewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord thy God require of thee*, &c.

The *firſt* being a mere queſtion, there needs no more

more to be ſaid of it, only that it is a queſtion of great importance; what is the moſt effectual way to appeaſe God when we have offended him? For who can bear his indignation, and who can ſtand before him, when once he is angry? Let us conſider then, in the

Second place, the way that men are apt to take to pacify God; and that is by ſome external piece of religion and devotion, ſuch as were ſacrifices among the Jews and Heathens. *Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings?* This is the way which men are moſt apt to chooſe. The Jews, you ſee, pitched upon the external parts of their religion, thoſe which were moſt pompous and ſolemn, the richeſt and moſt coſtly ſacrifices; ſo they might but keep their ſins, they were well enough content to offer up any thing elſe to God; they thought nothing too good for him, provided he would not oblige them to become better.

And thus it is among ourſelves, when we apprehend God is diſpleaſed with us, and his judgments are abroad in the earth, we are content to do any thing but to *learn righteouſneſs*; we are willing to ſubmit to any kind of external devotion and humiliation, to faſt, and pray, to afflict ourſelves, and to cry mightily unto God; things, ſome of them good in themſelves, but the leaſt part of that which God requires of us.

And as for the church of Rome, in caſe of publick judgments and calamities, they are the moſt inquiſitive and (as they pretend) the moſt skilful people in the world to pacify God; and they have a thouſand ſolemn devices to this purpoſe. I do not wrong them, by repreſenting them enquiring after this manner. "Shall I go before a crucifix, and bow myſelf to "it, as to the high God? And becauſe the Lord is "*a great king*, and it is perhaps too much boldneſs and arrogancy to make immediate addreſſes "always to him; to which of the Saints or Angels ſhall I go to mediate for me, and intercede on my behalf? Will the Lord be pleaſed "with thouſands of *Pater-noſters*, or with ten thou-

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" ſands of *Ave-Marys*? Shall the Holt travel in pro-
" ceſſion, or myſelf undertake a tedious Pilgrimage?
" Or ſhall I liſt myſelf a ſoldier for the holy war,
" or for the extirpation of hereticks? Shall I give
" half my eſtate to a convent for my tranſgreſſion,
" or chaſtiſe and puniſh my body for the ſin of my
" ſoul?" Thus men deceive themſelves, and will ſubmit to all the extravagant ſeverities, that the petulancy and folly of men can deviſe and impoſe upon them. And indeed it is not to be imagined, when men are once under the power of ſuperſtition, how ridiculous they may be, and yet think themſelves religious; how prodigiouſly they may play the fool, and yet believe they pleaſe God; what cruel and barbarous things they may do to themſelves and others, and yet be *verily perſuaded they do God good ſervice.*

And what is the myſtery of all this, but that men are loth to do that, without which nothing elſe that we do is acceptable to God? They hate to be reformed; and for this reaſon, they will be content to do any thing, rather than be put to the trouble of mending themſelves; every thing is eaſy in compariſon of this task, and God may have any terms of them, ſo he will let them be quiet in their ſins, and excuſe them from the real virtues of a good life. And this brings me to the

Third thing which I principally intended to ſpeak to. The courſe which God himſelf directs to, and which will effectually pacify him. *He hath ſhewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do juſtly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?* In the handling of which, I ſhall,

Firſt, Conſider thoſe ſeveral duties which God here requires of us, and upon the performance of which he will be pacified towards us.

Secondly, By what ways and means God hath diſcovered theſe duties to us, and the goodneſs of them; *he hath ſhewed thee, O man, what is good;* &c.

I. We will briefly conſider the ſeveral duties which God here requires of us, and upon the performance of

of which he will be pacified towards us. *What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?*

It was usual among the Jews to reduce all the duties of religion to these three heads, justice, mercy, and piety; under the first two, comprehending the duties which we owe to one another; and under the third, the duties which we owe to God.

1. Justice. And I was going to tell you what it is, but I considered that every man knows it, as well as any definition can explain it to him. I shall only put you in mind of some of the principal instances of it, and the several virtues comprehended under it. And,

First, Justice is concerned in the making of laws, that they be such as are equal and reasonable, useful and beneficial, for the honour of God and religion, and for the publick good of human society; this is a great trust, in the discharge of which, if men be biassed by favour or interest, and drawn aside from the consideration and regard of the publick good, it is a far greater crime, and of worse consequence, than any private act of injustice between man and man.

And then justice is also concerned in the due execution of laws; which are the guard of private property, the security of publick peace, and of religion and good manners. And,

Lastly, In the observance of laws and obedience to them; which is a debt that every man owes to human society.

But more especially justice is concerned in the observance of those laws, whether of God or man, which respect the rights of men, and their mutual commerce and intercourse with one another. That we use honesty and integrity in all our dealings, in opposition to fraud and deceit; truth and fidelity, in opposition to falshood and breach of trust; equity and good conscience, in opposition to all kind of oppression and exaction. These are the principal branches and instances of this great and comprehensive duty of justice; the violation whereof is so much

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the greatest sin, because this virtue is the firmest bond of human society, upon the observation whereof, the peace and happiness of mankind does so much depend.

2. Mercy, which does not only signify the inward affection of pity and compassion towards those that are in misery and necessity, but the effects of it, in the actual relief of those whose condition calls for our charitable help and assistance; by feeding the hungry, and cloathing the naked, and visiting the sick, and vindicating the oppressed, and comforting the afflicted, and ministring ease and relief to them if it be in our power. And this is a very lovely virtue, and argues more goodness in men than mere justice doth. For justice is a strict debt; but mercy is favour and kindness. And this perhaps may be the reason of the different expressions in the text, that when God barely commands us to *do justly*, he requires we should *love mercy*, that is, take a particular pleasure and delight in the exercise of this virtue, which is so proper and agreeable to mankind, that we commonly call it *humanity*, giving it its name from our very nature. In short, it is so excellent a virtue, that I should be very sorry that any religion should be able to pretend to the practice of it more than our own.

3. Piety; *to walk humbly with thy God. To walk humbly in the fear of the Lord*; so the Chaldee paraphrase renders these words. And this phrase may comprehend all those acts of religion which refer immediately to God; a firm belief of his being and perfections; an awful sense of him, as the dread Sovereign and righteous Judge of the world; a due regard to his service, and a reverent behaviour of ourselves towards him in all acts of worship and religion, in opposition to atheism and a profane neglect and contempt of God and religion; a new and monstrous kind of impiety! which of late years hath broke in upon us, and got head among us, not only contrary to the example of former ages, but in despite of the very genius and temper of the nation, which is naturally devout and zealous in religion.

Or

Or elſe this phraſe of *walking humbly with God*, may refer more particularly to the poſture and condition of the people of Iſrael at that time, who were fallen under the heavy diſpleaſure of God for their ſins. And then the duty required is, that being ſenſible how highly God hath been offended by us, by the general corruption and vitiouſneſs of the age, which like a leproſy hath ſpread itſelf almoſt over the whole body of the nation, and by that open lewdneſs and thoſe inſolent impieties which are daily committed amongſt us; I ſay, that being deeply ſenſible of this, we do with all humility acknowledge our ſins to God, and repent of them, and implore his mercy and forgiveneſs, and reſolve by his grace *to turn every one from the evil of our ways*, and from *the wickedneſs that is in our hands*; which God grant we may every one do * this day, according to the pious deſign and intention of it. And if we be ſincere in this reſolution, *who can tell but God will turn and repent, and turn away his anger from us, that we periſh not?* Nay, we have great reaſon to believe, that he will be pacified towards us. So he hath declared, Iſa. i. 16. *Waſh ye, make ye clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; ceaſe to do evil, learn to do well; ſeek judgment, relieve the oppreſſed, judge the fatherleſs, plead for the widow. Come now and let us reaſon together, ſaith the Lord; though your ſins be as ſcarlet, they ſhall be as white as ſnow; though they be red like crimſon, they ſhall be as wool.* But if we continue unreformed God will ſay to us, as he does there to the people of Iſrael, *To what purpoſe is the multitude of your ſacrifices unto me? Your calling of aſſemblies I cannot away with, it is iniquity, even the ſolemn meeting; and when ye ſpread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you, and when ye make many prayers, I will not hear.* To which, let me add that excellent ſaying of the ſon of Syrach to this purpoſe, Eccluſ. xxxiv. 25, 26. *He that waſheth himſelf after the touching of a dead body, if he touch it again, what availeth his waſhing? So is it with a man that faſteth*

* This ſermon was preached upon occaſion of a publick faſt.

eth for his sins, and goeth again and doth the same things. Who will hear his prayer, or what doth his humbling profit him?

II. Let us consider by what ways and means God hath made known these duties to us, and the goodness and obligation of them, *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee?* I shall mention five ways whereby God hath discovered this to us:

1. By a kind of natural instinct.
2. By natural reason.
3. By the general vote and consent of mankind.
4. By external revelation.
5. By the inward dictates and motions of God's Spirit upon the minds of men.

First, By a kind of natural instinct, by which I mean a secret impression upon the minds of men, whereby they are naturally carried to approve some things as good and fit, and to dislike other things, as having a native evil and deformity in them. And this I call *a natural instinct*, because it does not seem to proceed so much from the exercise of our reason, as from a natural propension and inclination, like those instincts, which are in brute creatures, of natural affection and care toward their young ones. And that these inclinations are precedent to all reason and discourse about them, evidently appears by this, that they do put forth themselves every whit as vigorously in young persons, as in those of riper reason; in the rude and ignorant sort of people, as in those who are more polished and refined. For we see plainly that the young and ignorant have as strong impressions of piety and devotion, as true a sense of gratitude, and justice and pity, as the wiser and more knowing part of mankind. A plain indication, that the reason of mankind is prevented by a kind of natural instinct and anticipation, concerning the good or evil, the comeliness or deformity of these things. And though this do not equally extend to all the instances of our duty, yet as to the great lines and essential parts of it, mankind hardly need to consult any other oracle, than the mere propensions and inclinations

clinations of their nature; as whether we ought to reverence the divine nature, to be grateful to those who have conferred benefits upon us, to speak the truth, to be faithful to our promise, to restore that which is committed to us in trust, to pity and relieve those that are in misery, and in all things to do to others as we would have them to do to us. And this will further appear, if we consider these two things:

1. That men are naturally innocent or guilty to themselves, according to what they do in these things. So the Apostle tells us, Rom. ii. 14, 15. *When the Gentiles which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law, are a law unto themselves, and do shew the effect of the law written in their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts by turns* (that is, according as they do well or ill) *accusing or excusing them.* There is a secret comfort in innocence, and a strange pleasure and satisfaction in being acquitted by our own minds for what we do. But, on the contrary, when we contradict those natural dictates, what uneasiness do we find in our own breasts? Nay, even before the fact is committed, our conscience is strangely disquieted at the thoughts of it. When a man does but design to do a bad thing, he is as guilty to himself, as if he had committed it. Of this we have a considerable instance, in the first violence that was offered to nature, Gen. iv. 6. *The Lord said unto Cain, why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen?* The very thought of that wickedness which he did but then design, did disorder his mind, and make a change in his very countenance. Guilt is the natural concomitant of heinous crimes, which so soon as ever a man commits, his spirit receives a secret wound, which causeth a great deal of smart and anguish. For guilt is restless, and puts the mind of man into an unnatural working and fermentation, never to be settled again but by repentance. *The wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest*; which plainly shews that the mind of man hath a kind of natural sense of good and evil; because whenever we offend against nature, our consciences

are touched to the quick, and we receive a ſting into our ſoul, which ſhoots and pains us, whenever we reflect on what we have done. I appeal to that witneſs which every man carries in his breaſt, whether this be not true.

2. Men are naturally full of hopes and fears, according as they follow or go againſt theſe natural dictates. A good conſcience is apt to fill men with confidence and good hopes. It does not only give eaſe, but ſecurity to the mind of man, againſt the dread of inviſible powers, and the fearful apprehenſions of a future judgment. Whereas guilt fills men with diſmal apprehenſions of danger, and continual miſgivings concerning their own ſafety. Thus it was with Cain after he had ſlain his brother; *It ſhall come to paſs that every one that findeth me ſhall ſlay me.* Nay, when a man hath done a ſecret fault, which none can accuſe him of, yet then is he haunted with the terrors of his own mind, and cannot be ſecure in his own apprehenſions; which plainly ſhews that men are conſcious to themſelves, when they do well, and when they do amiſs; and that the ſame natural inſtinct which prompts men to their duty, fills them with good hopes when they have done it, and with ſecret fears and apprehenſions of danger when they have done contrary to it.

Secondly, God ſhews men what is good, by natural reaſon; and that two ways; by the convenience of things to our nature; and by their tendency to our happineſs and intereſt.

Firſt, Reaſon ſhews us the convenience of things to our nature; and whatever is agreeable to the primitive deſign and intention of nature, that we call good; whatever is contrary thereto, we call evil. For example, to honour and love God. It is natural to honour great power and perfection, and to love goodneſs wherever it is. So likewiſe gratitude is natural, to acknowledge benefits received, and to be ready to requite them; and the contrary is monſtrous, and univerſally abhorred: and there is no greater ſign that any thing is contrary to nature, than if it be deteſted by the whole kind. It is agreeable alſo

to

to nature to be juſt, and to do to others, as we would have them to do to us; for this is to make our own natural inclinations and deſires the rule of our dealing with others; and to be merciful; for no man that hath not diveſted himſelf of humanity, can be cruel and hard-hearted to others, without feeling a pain in himſelf.

Secondly, Reaſon ſhews us the tendency of theſe things to our happineſs and intereſt. And indeed the notion of good and evil does commonly refer to the conſequences of things, and we call that good, which will bring ſome benefit and advantage to us, and that evil, which is likely to produce ſome miſchief and inconvenience; and by this rule reaſon diſcovers to us that theſe duties are good.

To begin with piety towards God. Nothing can more evidently tend to our intereſt, than to make him our friend, upon whoſe favour our happineſs depends. So likewiſe for gratitude; it is a virtue, to which if nature did not prompt us, our intereſt would direct us; for every man is ready to place benefits there where he may hope for a thankful return. Temperance does apparently conduce to our health, which, next to a good conſcience, is the moſt pleaſant and valuable thing in the world; whereas the intemperate man is an open enemy to himſelf, and continually making aſſaults upon his own life. Mercy and pity are not more welcome to others, than they are delightful and beneficial to ourſelves; for we do not only gratify our own nature and bowels, by relieving thoſe who are in miſery, but we provoke mankind by our example to the like tenderneſs, and do prudently beſpeak the commiſeration of others towards us, when it ſhall be our turn to ſtand in need of it. And if we be wiſe enough, our reaſon will likewiſe direct us to be juſt, as the ſureſt art of thriving in this world; it gives a man a reputation, which is a powerful advantage in all the affairs of this world; it is the ſhorteſt and eaſieſt way of diſpatching buſineſs, the plaineſt, and leaſt entangled; and though it be not ſo ſudden a way of growing rich, as fraud and oppreſſion, yet it is much ſurer and more laſting, and

not liable to those terrible back-blows and after-reckonings, to which estates got by injustice are.

And natural reason does not only shew us that these things are good, but that the Lord requires them of us, that is, that they have the force and obligation of laws. For there needs nothing more to make any thing a law, than a sufficient declaration, that it is the will of God; and this God hath sufficiently signified to mankind by the very frame of our natures, and of those principles and faculties which he hath endued us withal; so that whenever we act contrary to these, we plainly disobey the will of him that made us, and violate those laws which he hath enacted in our natures, and written upon our hearts.

And this is all the law that the greatest part of mankind were under, before the revelation of the Gospel. From Adam to Moses, the world was almost solely governed by the natural law; which seems to be the meaning of that hard text, Rom. v. 13. *For until the law sin was in the world*; that is, before the law of Moses was given, men were capable of offending against some other law, for otherwise sin could not have been imputed to them, for *sin is not imputed where there is no law*. And then it follows, *Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression*; that is, during that space from Adam to Moses, men sinned against the natural law, and were liable to death upon that account, though they had not offended against an express revelation from God, as Adam had done; for that the Apostle seems to mean, by *sinning after the similitude of Adam's transgression*.

Thirdly, God hath shewn us what is good by the general vote and consent of mankind. Not that all mankind do agree concerning virtue and vice; but that as to the greater duties of piety, justice, mercy, and the like, the exceptions are but few in comparison, and not enough to infringe a general consent. And of this I shall offer to you this threefold evidence:

1. That

1. That these virtues are generally praised and held in esteem by mankind, and the contrary vices generally reproved and evil spoken of: Now to praise any thing, is to give testimony to the goodness of it, and to censure any thing, is to declare that we believe it to be evil. And if we consult the history of all ages, we shall find that the things which are generally praised in the lives of men, and recommended to the imitation of posterity, are piety and devotion, gratitude and justice, humanity and charity; and that the contrary to these are marked with ignominy and reproach; the former are commended even in enemies, and the latter are branded even by those who had a kindness for the persons that were guilty of them. So constant hath mankind always been in the commendation of virtue, and the censure of vice. Nay we find not only those who are virtuous themselves giving their testimony and applause to virtue, but even those who are vicious; not out of love to goodness, but from the conviction of their own minds, and from a secret reverence they bear to the common consent and opinion of mankind. And this is a great testimony, because it is the testimony of an enemy extorted by the mere light and force of truth.

And on the contrary, nothing is more ordinary than for vice to reprove sin, and to hear men condemn the like, or the the same things in others, which they allow in themselves. And this is a clear evidence, that vice is generally condemned by mankind, that many men condemn it in themselves; and those who are so kind as to spare themselves, are very quick-sighted to spy a fault in any body else, and will censure a bad action done by another, with as much freedom and impartiality, as the most virtuous man in the world.

And to this consent of mankind about virtue and vice, the scripture frequently appeals. As when it commands us to *provide things honest in the sight of all men; and by well-doing to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men*; intimating, that there are some things so confessedly good, and owned to be such

by ſo general a vote of mankind, that the worſt of men have not the face to open their mouths againſt them. And it is made the character of a virtuous action, if it be *lovely* and *commendable*, and *of good report*, Philip. iv. 8. *Whatſoever things are lovely, whatſoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, if there be any praiſe, make account of theſe things*; intimating to us, that mankind do generally concur in the praiſe and commendation of what is virtuous.

2. Men do generally glory and ſtand upon their innocency, when they do virtuouſly; but are aſhamed and out of countenance, when they do the contrary. Now glory and ſhame are nothing elſe but an appeal to the judgment of others concerning the good or evil of our actions. There are indeed ſome ſuch monſters as are impudent in their impieties, but theſe are but few in compariſon. Generally mankind is modeſt, the greateſt part of thoſe who do evil are apt to bluſh at their own faults, and to confeſs them in their countenance, which is an acknowledgment that they are not only guilty to themſelves that they have done amiſs, but that they are apprehenſive that others think ſo. For guilt is a paſſion reſpecting ourſelves, but ſhame regards others. Now it is a ſign of ſhame, that men love to conceal their faults from others, and commit them ſecretly, in the dark, and without witneſſes, and are afraid even of a child or a fool: Or if they be diſcovered in them, they are ſolicitous to excuſe and extenuate them, and ready to lay the fault upon any body elſe, or to tranſfer their guilt, or as much of it as they can, upon others. All which are certain tokens, that men are not only naturally guilty to themſelves, when they commit a fault; but that they are ſenſible alſo what opinions others have of theſe things.

And on the contrary, men are apt to ſtand upon their juſtification, and to glory when they have done well. The conſcience of a man's own virtue and integrity, lifts up his head and gives him confidence before others, becauſe he is ſatisfied they have a good opinion of his actions. What a good face does a man

man naturally ſet upon a good deed? And how does he ſneak when he hath done wickedly, being ſenſible that he is condemned by others, as well as by himſelf? No man is afraid of being upbraided for having dealt honeſtly or kindly with others, nor does he account it any calumny or reproach, to have it reported of him, that he is a ſober and chaſte man. No man bluſheth when he meets a man with whom he hath kept his word, and diſcharged his truſt: but every man is apt to do ſo, when he meets one with whom he has dealt diſhoneſtly, or who knows ſome notorious crime by him.

8. Vice is generally forbidden and puniſhed by human laws; but againſt the contrary virtues there never was any law. Some vices are ſo manifeſtly evil in themſelves, or ſo miſchievous to human ſociety, that the laws of moſt nations have taken care to diſcountenance them by ſevere penalties. Scarce any nation was ever ſo barbarous, as not to maintain and vindicate the honour of their Gods and religion by publick laws. Murder and adultery, rebellion and ſedition, perjury and breach of truſt, fraud and oppreſſion are vices ſeverely prohibited by the laws of moſt nations. A clear indication, what opinion the generality of mankind, and the wiſdom of nations have always had of theſe things.

But now againſt the contrary virtues there never was any law. No man was ever impeached for *living ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly in this preſent world.* A plain acknowledgment, that mankind always thought them good, and never were ſenſible of the inconvenience of them; for had they been ſo, they would have provided againſt them by laws. This St. Paul takes notice of as a great commendation of the Chriſtian virtues; *The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-ſuffering, gentleneſs, kindneſs, fidelity, meekneſs, temperance; againſt ſuch there is no law;* the greateſt evidence that could be given, that theſe things are unqueſtionably good in the eſteem of mankind, *againſt ſuch there is no law.* As if he had ſaid, turn over the law of Moſes, ſearch thoſe of Athens, and Sparta, and the twelve tables of the

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Romans, and those innumerable laws that have been added since; and you shall not in any of them find any of those virtues that I have mentioned, condemned and forbidden. A clear evidence that mankind never took any exception against them, but are generally agreed about the goodness of them.

Fourthly, God hath shewn us what is good by external revelation. In former ages of the world, God revealed his will to particular persons in an extraordinary manner, and more especially to the nation of the Jews, the rest of the world being in a great measure left to the conduct of natural light. But in these latter ages he hath made publick revelation of his will by his Son. And this, as to the matter of our duty, is the same in substance with the law of nature; for our Saviour comprehends all under these two general heads, *the love of God*, and *of our neighbour*. The Apostle reduceth all to three, sobriety, justice, and piety; *The grace of God that brings salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world.* So that if we believe the Apostle, the gospel teacheth us the very same things which nature dictated to men before; only it hath made a more perfect discovery of them. So that whatever was doubtful and obscure before, is now certain and plain; the duties are still the same, only it offers us more powerful arguments, and a greater assistance to the performance of those duties; so that we may now much better say, than the Prophet could in his days, *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what it is that the Lord requires of thee.*

Fifthly and *lastly*, God shews us what is good, by the motions of his Spirit upon the minds of men. This the scripture assures us of, and good men have experience more especially of it; though it be hard to give an account of it, and to say what motions are from the Spirit of God, and what from our own minds; for *as the wind blows where it listeth, and we hear the sound of it, but know not whence it comes, nor whither it goes*; so are the operations of the Spi-

rit of God upon the minds of men, ſecret and imperceptible.

And thus I have done with the three things I propounded to ſpeak to. All that now remains, is to make ſome inferences from what hath been ſaid, by way of application.

Firſt, Seeing God hath ſo abundantly provided that we ſhould know our duty, we are altogether inexcuſable, if we do not do it. Becauſe *he hath ſhewed thee, O man, what is good, and what the Lord requires of thee*; therefore *thou art inexcuſable, O man, whoſoever thou art*, who liveſt in a contradiction to this light. God hath acquainted us with our duty, by ſuch ways as may moſt effectually both direct and engage us to the practice of it; we are prompted to it by a kind of natural inſtinct, and ſtrong impreſſions upon our minds of the difference of good and evil; we are led to the knowledge, and urged to the practice of it, by our nature, and by our reaſon, and by our intereſt, and by that which is commonly very prevalent among men, the general voice and conſent of mankind; and by the moſt powerful and governing paſſions in human nature, by hope, and by fear, and by ſhame; by the proſpect of advantage, by the apprehenſion of danger, and by the ſenſe of honour; and to take away all poſſible excuſe of ignorance from us, by an expreſs revelation from God, the cleareſt and moſt perfect that ever was made to the world. So that whenever we do contrary to our duty, in any of theſe great inſtances, we offend againſt all theſe, and do in the higheſt degree fall under the heavy ſentence of our Saviour, *this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkneſs rather than light.*

Secondly, You ſee hence what are the great duties of religion, which God mainly requires of us, and how reaſonable they are; piety towards God, and juſtice and charity towards men; the knowledge whereof is planted in our nature, and grows up with our reaſon. And theſe are things which are unqueſtionably good, and againſt which we can have no ex-

exception; things that were never reproved, nor found fault with by mankind, neither our nature nor our reason riseth up against them, or dictates any thing to the contrary. We have all the obligation, and we have all the encouragement to them, and are secure on all hands in the practice of them. In the doing of these things, there is no danger to us from the laws of men, no fear of displeasure from God, no offence or sting from our own minds.

And these things, which are so agreeable to our nature, and our reason, and our interest, are the great things which our religion requires of us, more valuable in themselves, and more acceptable to God, than *whole burnt offerings and sacrifices*, more than *thousands of rams, and ten thousands of rivers of oil*; more than if we offered to him *all the beasts of the forrest, and the cattle upon a thousand hills*. We are not to neglect any institution of God; but above all, we are to secure the observance of those great duties to which we are directed by our very nature, and tied by the surest and most sacred of all other laws, those which God hath riveted in our souls, and written upon our hearts; and that mankind might have no pretence left to excuse them from those, the Christian religion hath set us free from those many positive and outward observances, that the Jewish religion was incumbered withal; that we might be wholly intent upon these great duties, and mind nothing in comparison of the real and substantial virtues of a good life.

Thirdly, You see, in the last place, what is the best way to appease the displeasure of God towards a sinful nation. God seems to have as great a controversy with us, as he had with the people of Israel, and his wrath is of late years most visibly gone out against us; and proportionably to the full measure of our sins, it hath been poured out upon us in full vials. How have the judgments of God followed us? And how close have they followed one another? What fearful calamities have our eyes seen? enough to make the ears of every one that hears them to tingle. What terrible and hazardous wars have we been engaged

gaged in? What a raging peſtilence did God ſend among us, that ſwept away thouſands, and ten thouſands in our ſtreets? What a dreadful and fatal fire, that was not to be checked and reſiſted in its courſe, till it had laid in aſhes one of the greateſt and richeſt cities in the world? What unſeaſonable weather have we had of late? as if for the wickedneſs of men upon the earth, the very *ordinances of heaven were changed*, and *ſummer and winter, ſeed-time and harveſt*, had forgotten their *appointed ſeaſons*. And which *is* more and ſadder than all this, what dangerous attempts have been made upon our religion, by the reſtleſs adverſaries of it?

And now ſurely, *after all this is come upon us for our ſins*, it is time for us to look up to him that ſmites us, and to think of taking up this quarrel. It is time to enquire as they do in the text, *wherewith ſhall we come before the Lord, and bow ourſelves before the high God?* And we are apt to take the ſame courſe they did, to endeavour to appeaſe God by ſome external devotion. We have now betaken ourſelves to prayer and faſting, and it was very fit, nay neceſſary we ſhould do ſo; but let us not think this is all God expects from us. Theſe are but a means to a further end, to oblige us for the future to the practice of a good life. The outward profeſſion of religion is not loſt among us, there appears ſtill in men a great and commendable zeal for the reformed religion, and there hath been too much occaſion for it; but that which God chiefly expects from us, is reformed lives. Piety and virtue are in a great meaſure gone from among us, the manners of men are ſtrangely corrupted, *the great and weighty things of the law* are neglected, *juſtice* and *mercy, temperance* and *chaſtity*, *truth* and *fidelity*; ſo that we may take up David's complaint, *Help Lord! for the righteous man ceaſeth, for the faithful fail from among the children of men.*

And till the nation be brought back to a ſober ſenſe of religion, from an airy and fantaſtical piety, to real and unaffected devotion, and from a factious contention about things indifferent, to the ſeri-

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ous practice of what is neceſſary; from our violent hates and animoſities, to a more peaceable temper, and by a mutual condeſcenſion on all ſides, to a nearer and ſtronger union among ourſelves, till we recover in ſome meaſure our ancient virtue and integrity of manners, we have reaſon to fear, that God will ſtill have a controverſy with us, notwithſtanding all our noiſe and zeal about religion.

This is the true, this is the only courſe to appeaſe the indignation of God, and to draw down his favour and bleſſing upon a poor diſtracted and gaſping nation. *He hath ſhewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do juſtly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?*

I have but one word more, and that is to put you preſently upon the practice of one of theſe duties that I have been perſuading you to, and that is mercy, and alms to the poor. If what I have already ſaid, have had its effect upon you, I need not uſe any other arguments; if it have not, I have hardly the heart to uſe any. I ſhall only put you in mind again, that God values this above all our external devotion, *he will have mercy rather than ſacrifice*; that this is the way to find mercy with God, and to have our prayers ſpeed in heaven; and without this, all our faſting and humiliation ſignifies nothing. And to this purpoſe I will only read to you thoſe plain and perſuaſive words of the prophet, which do ſo fully declare unto us the whole duty of this day, and particularly urge us to this of charity, Iſa. lviii. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9. *Is it ſuch a faſt that I have choſen? a day for a man to afflict his ſoul? Is it to bow down his head as a bulruſh, and to ſpread ſackcloth and aſhes under him? Wilt thou call this a faſt, and an acceptable day unto the Lord? Is not this the faſt that I have choſen? to looſe the bands of wickedneſs, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppreſſed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are caſt out to thy houſe? when thou ſeeſt the naked, that thou cover him, and that thou hide*

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not thyſelf from thine own fleſh? Then ſhall thy light break forth as the morning, and thy ſalvation ſhall ſpring forth ſpeedily, and thy righteouſneſs ſhall go before thee, and the glory of the Lord ſhall be thy rere-ward. Then thou ſhalt call, and the Lord ſhall anſwer; thou ſhalt cry, and he ſhall ſay, here I am.

SERMON CIII.

Inſtituted religion not intended to undermine natural.

MATTH. ix. 13.

But go ye and learn what that meaneth; I will have mercy, and not ſacrifice.

ONE of the moſt ſucceſsful attempts that have been made upon religion, by the Devil and his inſtruments, hath been by ſetting the laws of God at variance with themſelves, and by daſhing the ſeveral parts of religion, and the two tables of the law againſt one another, to break all in pieces; and under a pretence of advancing that part of religion which is inſtituted and revealed, to undermine and deſtroy that which is natural, and of primary obligation.

To manifeſt and lay open the miſchievous conſequences of this deſign, I ſhall at this time (by God's aſſiſtance) endeavour to make out theſe two things:

Firſt, That natural religion is the foundation of all inſtituted and revealed religion.

Secondly, That no revealed or inſtituted religion was ever deſigned to take away the obligation of natural duties, but to confirm and eſtabliſh them.

And to this purpoſe, I have choſen theſe words of our Saviour for the foundation of my following diſcourſe; *but go ye and learn what that meaneth; I will have mercy, and not ſacrifice.* The occaſion

of which words was briefly this; the Phariſees found fault with him for keeping company, and eating with publicans and ſinners. He owns the thing which they objected to him, and endeavours to vindicate himſelf from any crime or fault in ſo doing; and that, theſe two ways:

1. By telling them, that it was allowed to a Phyſician, and proper for his office and profeſſion, to converſe with the ſick, in order to their cure and recovery. He may abſtain, if he pleaſeth, from the converſation of others; but the ſick have need of him, and are his proper care, and his buſineſs and employment lies among them; *he ſaid unto them, they that be whole need not a phyſician, but they that are ſick; I came not to call the righteous, but ſinners to repentance*; they who were already good, needed not to be called upon to amend and reform their lives; and they that were ſo conceited of their own righteouſneſs, as the Phariſees were, and ſo confident that they were ſound and whole, would not admit of a Phyſician, and thereby rendered themſelves incapable of cure; and therefore he did not apply himſelf to them; but to the publicans and ſinners, who were acknowledged on all hands, both by themſelves and others, to be bad men; ſo that it could not be denied to be the proper work of a ſpiritual Phyſician to converſe with ſuch perſons.

2. By endeavouring to convince them of their ignorance of the true nature of religion, and of the rank and order of the ſeveral duties thereby required; *but go ye and learn what that meaneth; I will have mercy and not ſacrifice*; which ſaying is quoted by him out of the Prophet Hoſea, chap. vi. 6. *I deſired mercy, and not ſacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings*; which text our Saviour cites and applies upon two ſeveral occaſions; the conſidering and comparing of which, will give full light to the true meaning of it.

The firſt is here in the text, upon occaſion of the Phariſees finding fault with him, for converſing with publicans and ſinners; the other is, Matth. xii. 7. where the Phariſees blaming the diſciples of our Saviour

viour for plucking the ears of corn on the ſabbath day, our Saviour tells them, *If ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy and not ſacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltleſs*; that is, if they had underſtood the true nature of religion, and what duties of it are chiefly and in the firſt place to be regarded, they would not have been ſo forward to cenſure this action of his diſciples.

So that the plain meaning of this ſaying is this, that in comparing the parts of religion and the obligation of duties together, thoſe duties which are of moral and natural obligation, are moſt valued by God, and ought to take place of thoſe which are poſitive and ritual. *I will have mercy and not ſacrifice*, that is, *rather than ſacrifice*, according to the true meaning of this Hebrew phraſe, which is to be underſtood in a comparative ſenſe, as is evident from the text itſelf, in Hoſea, *I deſired mercy and not ſacrifice; and the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings*; if they cannot be obſerved together, let ſacrifice be neglected, and the work of mercy be done.

And the reaſon of this ſeems very plain; becauſe ſhewing mercy, or doing good in any kind is a prime inſtance of thoſe moral duties, which do naturally and perpetually oblige; but ſacrifice is an inſtance of poſitive and ritual obſervances, and one of the chief of the kind: ſo that when moral duties, and ritual obſervances come in competition, and do claſh with one another, the obſervation of a rite, or poſitive inſtitution, is to give way to a moral duty; and it is no ſin in that caſe to neglect the obſervation of ſuch a rite, yea though it were commanded and appointed by God himſelf. And though this may ſeem to be a breach of the letter of the law; yet it is according to the true mind and meaning of the law; it being a tacit condition implied in all laws of a ritual and poſitive nature, provided the obſervance of them be not to the hindrance and prejudice of any duty, which is of a higher and better nature; in that caſe the obligation of it does for that time give way, and is ſuſpended.

And this will appear to be the true meaning of this rule, by comparing more particularly the inſtances to which our Saviour applies it. His diſciples paſſing through the corn on the ſabbath day, and being hungry, pluckt the ears and did eat; this our Saviour does juſtify to be no breach of the law of the ſabbath; becauſe in that caſe, and in ſuch circumſtances, it did not oblige: for the diſciples being called to attend upon our Saviour, to be inſtructed by him in the things which concerned the kingdom of God, that is, in the doctrine of the goſpel, which they were to publiſh to the world, this attendance hindred them from making neceſſary proviſions againſt the ſabbath, they, in obedience to their maſter, being intent upon a better work; but that they might not ſtarve, the neceſſities of nature muſt be provided for; and therefore it was fit, that the law of the ſabbath, which was but poſitive and ritual, ſhould give way to an act of mercy and ſelf-preſervation; *If ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy and not ſacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltleſs.*

And the reaſon is the ſame as to any inſtrumental part of religion, by which I mean any thing which may be a means to promote piety and goodneſs; as prayer, hearing the word of God, keeping good company, and avoiding bad; the duties of this kind, our Saviour here in the text (where he likewiſe applies this rule) compares with moral duties. To avoid the company of vicious and wicked perſons, is a good means to preſerve men from the contagion of their vices, and was always eſteemed a duty among prudent men, both Jews and Heathens, and is no wiſe diſallowed by our Saviour: but yet not ſo a duty, as to hinder a greater duty, nor ſo ſtrictly and perverſely to be inſiſted upon, as if one ought not to converſe with bad men in any caſe, or upon any account, no, not for ſo great and good an end as to reclaim them from their vices. In this caſe we ought to conſider, that our firſt and higheſt obligation is to moral duties, comprehended under *the love of God and our neighbour*; among which one of the chief is to do good

good to men, and to ſhew mercy and pity to thoſe that are in miſery; and the greateſt good that one man can do to another, is to be inſtrumental to reclaim him from the evil and error of his way; becauſe this is *to ſave his ſoul from death*; and we cannot imagine that God ever intended, by any rule of prudence, or poſitive conſtitution of the Jewiſh law, ſo to forbid their accompanying with bad and ſcandalous men, that it ſhould be unlawful to converſe with them, in order to their recovery and amendment, *Go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not ſacrifice.*

And St. Paul was of the ſame mind in the precepts he gives concerning avoiding the company of ſcandalous Chriſtians, 2 Theſſ. iii. 14, 15. *And if any man obey not our word by this epiſtle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be aſhamed; yet count him not as an enemy, but admoniſh him as a brother.* St. Paul qualifies his precept, leſt Chriſtians ſhould miſtake it, and fall into the Jewiſh extreme, not to converſe with thoſe whom they eſteemed ſcandalous and wicked, upon any account whatſoever, no, not in order to their amendment and reformation. The bond of intimacy and friendſhip with bad men ought to be broken, and yet the bond of common humanity may be as ſtrong as ever. It is one thing to diſcountenance bad men, to bring them to ſhame, and a ſenſe of their fault; and quite another thing to abandon them to ruin; and even in caſe of notorious hereſy or wickedneſs of life, it is one thing to cut them off from the ſociety and communion of Chriſtians; and quite another, to cut them off from human ſociety, to cut their throats, and to extirpate them out of the world.

And yet the matter was carried thus far by the furious zeal of the Jews, when Chriſtianity firſt appeared in the world; they thought that no mercy in ſuch caſes was the beſt ſervice that could be done, and the beſt ſacrifice that could be offered to Almighty God; and this pattern hath been ſince, not only cloſely followed, but outdone by the doctrines and practices

of the church of Rome; as we have too much reaſon to remember upon * *this day*.

But to proceed in the further explication of the text, the meaning whereof, in ſhort is this; that the ritual and inſtrumental parts of religion, and all laws and duties concerning them, are of leſs value and eſteem with God, than thoſe which are of a moral nature, eſpecially the great duties and offices of piety and humanity, of the love of God, and of our neighbour. And if we conſider the matter well, we ſhall ſee the reaſon of it to be very plain; becauſe natural and moral duties are approved of God, for themſelves, and for their own ſake, upon account of their own natural and intrinſical goodneſs; but the ritual and inſtrumental parts of religion are only pleaſing to God in order to theſe, and ſo far as they tend to beget and promote them in us; they are not naturally good in themſelves, but are inſtituted and appointed by God for the ſake of the other; and therefore great reaſon there is that they ſhould be ſubordinate, and give way to them, when they come in competition with one another.

For this is a known rule, which takes place in all laws, *That laws of leſs importance ſhould give way to thoſe that are of greater; quoties leges ex circumſtantia colliduntur, ita ut utraque ſervari non poteſt, ſervanda eſt lex potior:* "Whenever two laws "happen to be in ſuch circumſtances as to claſh with "one another, ſo that both of them cannot be ob-"ſerved, that law which is better, and of greater "conſequence is to be kept." And Tully gives much the ſame rule in this matter. "In comparing "of laws (ſays he) we are to conſider which law is "moſt uſeful, and juſt, and reaſonable to be obſer-"ved." From whence it will follow, that when two laws, or more, or how many ſoever they be, cannot be obſerved, becauſe they claſh with one another; *ea maximè conſervanda putetur, quæ ad maximas res pertinere videatur:* "It is reaſonable "that that law ſhould be obſerved, which is of great-"eſt moment and concernment."

By

* *Preached on Nov.* 5. 1688.

By what hath been ſaid, we may learn what is the meaning of this ſaying, which our Saviour more than once cites out of the Prophet, *I will have mercy, and not ſacrifice.*

From the words thus explained, I ſhall take occaſion to proſecute the two propoſitions which I mentioned before, namely,

Firſt, That natural religion is the foundation of inſtituted and revealed religion.

Secondly, That no inſtituted religion was ever deſigned to take away the obligation of natural duties; but is intended to eſtabliſh and confirm them. And both theſe are ſufficiently grounded in the reaſon of our Saviour's diſcourſe from this rule, *I will have mercy, and not ſacrifice.*

I. That natural religion is the foundation of inſtituted and revealed religion; and all revealed religion does ſuppoſe, and take for granted, the clear and undoubted principles and precepts of natural religion, and builds upon them. By natural religion, I mean obedience to the natural law, and the performance of ſuch duties as natural light, without any expreſs and ſupernatural revelation, doth dictate to men. Theſe ly at the bottom of all religion, and are the great and fundamental duties which God requires of all mankind; as, that we ſhould love God, and behave ourſelves reverently towards him; that we ſhould believe his revelations; and teſtify our dependence upon him, by imploring his aid and direction in all our neceſſities and diſtreſſes; and acknowledge our obligations to him for all the bleſſings and benefits which we receive; that we ſhould moderate our appetites, in reference to the pleaſures and enjoyments of this world, and uſe them temperately and chaſtly; that we ſhould be juſt and upright in all our dealings with one another; true to our word, and faithful to our truſt; and in all our words and actions obſerve that equity towards others, which we deſire they ſhould uſe towards us; that we ſhould be kind, and charitable, merciful and compaſſionate one towards another; ready to do good to all, and apt not only to pity, but to relieve them in their miſery and neceſſity.

ceſſity. Theſe, and ſuch like, are thoſe which we call moral duties; and they are of eternal and perpetual obligation, becauſe they do naturally oblige, without any particular and expreſs revelation from God. And theſe are the foundation of revealed and inſtituted religion, and all revealed religion does ſuppoſe them, and build upon them; for all revelation from God, ſuppoſeth us to be men, and alters nothing of thoſe duties to which we were naturally obliged before. And this will clearly appear, if we conſider theſe three things;

Firſt, That the ſcripture every where ſpeaks of theſe, as the main and fundamental duties of the Jewiſh religion.

Secondly, That no inſtituted ſervice of God, no poſitive part of religion, was ever acceptable to him, when theſe were neglected.

Thirdly, That the great deſign of the Chriſtian religion, was to reſtore and reinforce the practice of the natural law.

1. That the ſcripture every where ſpeaks of theſe as the main and fundamental duties of the Jewiſh religion. When our Saviour was asked, *which was the firſt and great commandment of the law*; he anſwered, *Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy ſoul, and with all thy ſtrength; and thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thyſelf.* One would have expected he would have given quite another anſwer, and have pitched upon ſome of thoſe things which were ſo much magnified among the Jews, and which they laid ſo much weight upon, that he ſhould have inſtanced in ſacrifice, or circumciſion, or the law of the ſabbath: but he overlooks all theſe as inconſiderable in compariſon, and inſtances only in thoſe two great heads of moral duty, *the love of God, and our neighbour*; which are of natural and perpetual obligation, and comprehend under them all other moral duties.

And theſe are thoſe which our Saviour calls *the law and the Prophets*, and which he ſays *he came not to deſtroy, but to fulfil*, Matth. v. 17, 18, 19, 20. *Think not that I am come to deſtroy the law or the Prophets*:

Prophets. I am not come to deſtroy, but to fulfil: for verily I ſay unto you, till heaven and earth paſs, one jot, or one tittle ſhall in no wiſe paſs from the law till all be fulfilled. Whoſoever therefore ſhall break one of theſe leaſt commandments, and ſhall teach men ſo, he ſhall be called the leaſt in the kingdom of heaven; but whoſoever ſhall do and teach them, the ſame ſhall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I ſay unto you, that except your righteouſneſs ſhall exceed the righteouſneſs of the Scribes and Phariſees, ye ſhall in no caſe enter into the kingdom of heaven.

That our Saviour doth not here ſpeak of the judicial or ceremonial law of the Jews, but of the duties of the moral law, will, I think, be very plain, from theſe following conſiderations.

Firſt, That the judicial or ceremonial laws of the Jews were to paſs away, and did ſo not long after; but this law, which our Saviour ſpeaks of, was to be perpetual and immutable; for he tells us, *that heaven and earth ſhould paſs away, but one jot or one tittle of* this *law ſhould not paſs.*

Secondly, The obſervation of the law which our Saviour ſpeaks of, conſiſted in ſuch things as the Scribes and Phariſees neglected; for he tells his diſciples, upon this occaſion, *that except their righteouſneſs did exceed the righteouſneſs of the Scribes and Phariſees, they ſhould in no caſe enter into the kingdom of heaven.* But now the Scribes and Phariſees were the moſt accurate and punctual people in the world, in obſerving the precepts of the judicial and ceremonial law; they were ſo far from taking away any thing from theſe obſervances, that they had added to them, and enlarged them, by innumerable traditions of their own; ſo exact were they, that they would *pay tithe of mint, and aniſe, and cummin*, as our Saviour obſerves; but then they were extremely defective in moral duties; they were unnatural to their parents, and would pretend that their eſtates were conſecrated to God, that under this pretence of poſitive religion, they might excuſe themſelves from a natural duty, and let their parents

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ſtarve for God's ſake; they were covetous, and unjuſt, and *devoured widows houſes*; in a word, our Saviour tells us, they neglected *the weightier matters of the law, mercy, judgment, and the love of God, and keeping faith with men*; ſo that it is in theſe things, that our Saviour means, that *our righteouſneſs muſt exceed the righteouſneſs of the Scribes and Phariſees, viz.* in the practice of moral duties, which were neglected by them; and conſequently it is the moral law which our Saviour came to confirm and eſtabliſh.

Thirdly, If we conſider the inſtances which our Saviour gives in his following diſcourſe, by which we may beſt judge what he means. He inſtances in murder, and adultery, and perjury, which are undoubtedly forbidden by the natural law; and then he inſtances in ſeveral permiſſions which were indulged to them for the hardneſs of their hearts, but yet did intrench upon the dictates of right reaſon, and the firſt and original conſtitution of things; as the permiſſion of divorce upon every ſlight occaſion, and of revenge, and retaliation of injuries.

Fourthly, If we conſider, that by the *law and the Prophets*, our Saviour means that which was principally deſigned and ultimately intended by them; which was the obſervation of moral duties; which as they were written in the two tables, by the immediate finger of God himſelf, ſo are chiefly inculcated by the Prophets. And ſo we find this phraſe of *the law and the Prophets* elſewhere uſed by our Saviour, when he mentions that great rule of equity, that *we ſhould do to others as we would have them do to us*, Matth. vii. 12. *Therefore all things whatſoever ye would that men ſhould do to you, do ye even ſo to them: for this is the law and the Prophets.* But how was *this the law and the Prophets*, when this rule was never ſo much as mentioned in either? our Saviour means, that this is the foundation of all thoſe duties of juſtice and mercy, which are ſo much inculcated in *the law and the Prophets.*

So

So that our Saviour makes the obſervation of moral duties to be the principal deſign of the Jewiſh law, and as it were the foundation of it, and therefore he calls moral duties τὰ βαρύτερα τῦ νόμυ, *the weightier matters of the law*, Matth. xxiii. 23. *But ye* (ſays he to the Scribes and Phariſees) *have neglected the weightier things of the law, judgment, and mercy, and fidelity.* The Scribes and Phariſees buſied themſelves chiefly about ritual obſervances; but our Saviour tells them, that thoſe other were the moſt conſiderable and important duties of the law, and lay at the bottom of the Jewiſh religion. And much the ſame enumeration the Prophet makes, where he compares ſacrifices and theſe moral duties together, Mic. vi. 6, 7, 8. *Wherewith ſhall I come before the Lord, and bow myſelf before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleaſed with thouſands of rams, or with ten thouſands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firſt-born for my tranſgreſſion, the fruit of my body for the ſin of my ſoul? He hath ſhewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do juſtly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?* He had required ſacrifices, but had no regard to them in compariſon with theſe.

II. No inſtituted ſervice of God, no poſitive part of religion whatſoever, was ever acceptable to God, when moral duties were neglected; nay, ſo far from being acceptable to him, that he rejects them with diſdain and abhorrence. To this purpoſe there are almoſt innumerable paſſages in the prophets, Iſa. i. 11, &c. *To what purpoſe is the multitude of your ſacrifices unto me, when ye come to appear before me? who hath required this at your hands, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incenſe is an abomination to me; the new moons and ſabbaths, the calling of aſſemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the ſolemn meeting; and when ye ſpread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: When you make many prayers, I will not hear.* What is the reaſon of all this? becauſe they were defective

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in the moral duties of religion; ſo it follows, *your hands are full of blood; waſh ye, make ye clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; ceaſe to do evil, learn to do well; ſeek judgment, relieve the oppreſſed, judge the fatherleſs, plead for the widow; come now and let us reaſon together, ſaith the Lord*; implying that till they had reſpect to moral duties, all their external worſhip and ſacrifices ſignified nothing. And ſo likewiſe Iſa. lxvi. 3. he tells them that nothing could be more abominable than their ſacrifices, ſo long as they allowed themſelves in wicked practices, *He that killeth an ox is as if he ſlew a man; he that ſacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered ſwines blood; and he that burneth incenſe, as if he bleſſed an idol; yea, they have choſen their own ways, and their ſoul delighteth in their abominations.* And to mention but one text more out of the Old Teſtament, Jer. vii. 4, 5. *Truſt ye not in lying words, ſaying, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are theſe. Throughly amend your ways and your doings, throughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour; oppreſs not the ſtranger, the fatherleſs and the widow, and ſhed not innocent blood.* If they did not practiſe theſe duties, and forbear thoſe ſins, all the reverence for the temple, and the worſhip of God ſignifies nothing. You ſee in the Jewiſh religion what it was that was acceptable to God for itſelf and its own ſake, *viz.* the practice of moral duties; and that all inſtituted religion, that did not promote and further theſe, or was deſtitute of them, was abominable to God. And under the Goſpel our Saviour prefers a moral duty before any gift we can offer to God, and will have it to take place, Matth. v. 23, 24. *If thou bring thy gift unto the altar, and there remembereſt that thy brother hath ought againſt thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way, firſt be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.*

But it ſhould ſeem by this, and what hath been ſaid before, that God prefers goodneſs and righteouſneſs to men, before his own worſhip: And obedience

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to the precepts of the ſecond table, before obedience to thoſe of the firſt.

But this does but ſeem ſo; all that can be collected from this paſſage of our Saviour, or any thing that hath been already ſaid, are only theſe two things:

1. That God prefers the practice of the moral duties of the ſecond table, before any inſtituted worſhip, ſuch as ſacrifice was; and before obedience to the laws of religion, which are merely poſitive, though they do immediately concern the worſhip of God.

2. That if we neglect the duties of the ſecond table, of goodneſs and righteouſneſs towards men, God will not accept of our obedience to the precepts of the firſt, nor of any act of religious worſhip that we can perform. This our Saviour means when he ſays, *leave there thy gift before the altar, firſt be reconciled to thy brother, then come and offer thy gift*; intimating, that ſo long as we bear a revengeful mind towards our brethren, God will not accept of any gift or ſacrifice that we can offer to him; or indeed of any act of religious worſhip that we can perform.

Thirdly, The great deſign of the Chriſtian religion is to reſtore and reinforce the practice of the natural law, or, which is all one, of moral duties; and therefore our Saviour begins his firſt ſermon, by promiſing bleſſedneſs to the practice of theſe duties; of purity, and meekneſs, and righteouſneſs and peaceableneſs, and mercifulneſs, and patience, and ſubmiſſion to the will of God under perſecutions and ſufferings for righteouſneſs ſake; and tells us (as I ſhewed before) that he came not to releaſe men from the practice of theſe duties, but to oblige them thereto more effectually; and that as theſe were *the law and the Prophets*, that is, the main duties and the foundation of the Jewiſh religion, ſo were they much more to be ſo of the Chriſtian. This the ſcriptures of the New Teſtament do every where declare to be the great deſign of the goſpel, and the Chriſtian religion, to inſtruct us in theſe duties, and to engage us effectually to the practice of them. In that known and excellent text, Tit. ii. 11, 12. *The grace of God* (which is in and by the doctrine of the goſpel) *hath*

appeared to all men, teaching us that denying ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, we ſhould live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly in this preſent world. And herein St. James tells us, the true nature, and the force and virtue of the Chriſtian religion doth conſiſt, James i. 27. *Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to viſit the fatherleſs and the widows in their affliction, and to keep ourſelves unſpotted from the world.* And chap. iii. 17. *The wiſdom which is from above* (that is, that heavenly and divine knowledge revealed to us by the Goſpel) hath theſe properties, and is apt to produce theſe effects, it *is firſt pure, and then peaceable, gentle, and eaſy to be intreated, full of mercy, and of good fruits.*

And the planting of theſe diſpoſitions in us is that which the ſcripture calls *the new creature,* and *the image of God,* Eph. iv. 20, *&c.* The Apoſtle ſpeaking there of the vices and luſts wherein the Gentiles lived, tells Chriſtians that they were otherwiſe inſtructed by the goſpel; *But you have not ſo learned Chriſt, if ſo be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jeſus, that ye put off concerning the former converſation the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful luſts, and be renewed in the ſpirit of your mind, and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteouſneſs and true holineſs,* or (as the words perhaps may be better rendered) *in the holineſs of truth*; for it immediately follows, *Wherefore, putting away lying, ſpeak every man truth with his neighbour.*

And this is that which the Apoſtle elſewhere makes to be all in all in the Chriſtian religion. *In Chriſt Jeſus, neither circumciſion availeth any thing, nor uncircumciſion, but a new creature,* Gal. vi. 15. Which the Apoſtle in the chapter before expreſſeth thus, *In Chriſt Jeſus neither circumciſion availeth any thing, nor uncircumciſion, but faith which worketh* (or is inſpired) *by charity.* And yet more expreſly, 1 Cor. vii. 19. *Circumciſion is nothing, and uncircumciſion is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God.* By the comparing of which texts, it appears, that the main thing in Chriſtianity is the practice of moral duties

duties, and this is the new creature: and this is the proper effect of the Christian faith to produce these virtues in us. And indeed the great design of the Christian religion, and every thing in it, of the love of God in giving his Son to die for us, of the pardon of our sins, and justification in his blood, of all the promises and threatenings of the gospel, and of the assistance therein promised, is to engage and encourage, and enable to the practice of moral duties.

And thus I have done with the first thing I proposed to speak to, namely, that natural religion is the foundation of instituted and revealed religion; and all revealed religion does suppose it, and builds upon it. I proceed to the

Second, namely, That no revealed and instituted religion was ever designed to take away the obligation of natural duties, but was intended to confirm and establish them. And this also will be evident, if we consider these three things:

1. That all revealed religion calls men to the practice of natural duties. This the Jewish religion did. The first laws which God gave them, and which he distinguished from the rest, by writing them in tables of stone with his own finger, were the precepts of the moral law. And the great business of the Prophets whom God raised up among them from time to time, was to reprove not so much their defects in their sacrifices, and in the duties of instituted worship, as the breach of the natural law by their vices and immoralities; and to threaten them with the judgments of God, if they did not reform and amend their faults.

And now under the gospel, the preceptive part of it is almost wholly made up of moral duties, namely, those which are comprehended under those two great commandments, of *the love of God, and our neighbour.* In the Christian religion there is very little that is merely positive and instituted, besides the two sacraments, and praying to God in the name and mediation of Jesus Christ.

2. The most perfect revelation that ever God made to mankind (I mean that of the Christian religion)

doth furniſh us with the beſt helps and advantages for the performance of moral duties; it diſcovers our duty more clearly to us; it offers us the greateſt aſſiſtance to enable us to the performance of it; it preſents us with the moſt powerful motives and arguments to engage us thereto; ſo that this revelation of the goſpel is ſo far from weakening the obligation of natural duties, that it confirms and ſtrengthens it, and urges us more forcibly to the practice of them.

3. The poſitive rites and inſtitutions of revealed religion are ſo far from intrenching upon the laws of nature, that they were always deſigned to be ſubordinate and ſubſervient to them; and whenever they come in competition, it is the declared will of God, that poſitive inſtitutions ſhould give way to natural duties; and this I have ſhewn to be plainly the meaning of this ſaying in the text, *I will have mercy, and not ſacrifice.* If circumſtances be ſuch, that one part of religion muſt give place, God will have the ritual and inſtituted part to give way to that which is natural and moral.

It is very frequent in ſcripture, when the duties of natural religion, and rites of divine inſtitution come in competition, to ſlight and diſparage theſe in compariſon of moral duties, and to ſpeak of them as things which God hath no pleaſure in, and which in compariſon of the other he will hardly own that he hath commanded. *When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand?* Iſa. i. 12. *Thou deſireſt not ſacrifice, thou delighteſt not in burnt offerings.* Pſal. li. 16. *Will the Lord be pleaſed with thouſands of rams, or ten thouſands of rivers of oil? He hath ſhewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do juſtly, and to love mercy?*

But God no where makes any compariſon to the diſadvantage of natural duties; he never derogated from them in any caſe; he never ſaid he would have ſuch a thing, and not mercy; or, that he had rather ſuch a rite of religion ſhould be performed, than that men ſhould do the greateſt good, and ſhew the greateſt charity to one another. It is no where made a que-

queſtion, Will the Lord be pleaſed that we deal juſtly every man with his neighbour, and ſpeak the truth one to another? that we be kind and tender-hearted, and ready to forgive? that we be willing to diſtribute and give alms to thoſe that are in need? there is no ſuch queſtion as this put in ſcripture; nay it is poſitive in theſe matters, that *with ſuch ſacrifices God is well pleaſed.* I inſtance in this virtue more eſpecially of kindneſs and compaſſion, becauſe it is one of the prime inſtances of moral duties; as ſacrifice is put for all the ritual and inſtituted part of religion, and this diſpoſition of mind our Saviour makes the root of all moral duties; *love is the fulfilling of the law*; and the Apoſtle ſpeaks of it as the great end and ſcope of the goſpel; *the end of the commandment is charity*; and this temper and diſpoſition of mind he advanceth above knowledge, and faith, and hope; *the greateſt of theſe is charity*; and without this, he will not allow a man to be any thing in Chriſtianity; this he makes our higheſt perfection and attainment, and that which abides and remains in the future ſtate; *charity never fails.*

This our Saviour moſt effectually recommends to us, both in his doctrine, and by his example; this he preſſeth as a peculiar law of his religion, and the proper mark and character of a diſciple. This he requires us to exerciſe towards thoſe who practiſe the contrary towards us; *to love our enemies, and to do good to them that hate us.* And of this he hath given the greateſt example that ever was; *when we were enemies to him*, he loved us ſo as hardly ever any man did his friend, ſo as *to lay down his life for us*; and he inſtituted the ſacrament for a memorial of his love to mankind, and to put us in mind how we ought to love one another.

And now the application of what hath been ſaid upon this argument, to the occaſion of this day, is very obvious, and there are two very natural inferences from it.

Firſt, From what hath been ſaid upon this argument, it plainly appears what place natural and moral duties ought to have in the Chriſtian religion;

and of all natural duties, mercy and goodneſs. This is ſo primary a duty of human nature, ſo great and conſiderable a part of religion, that all poſitive inſtitutions muſt give way to it; and nothing of that kind can cancel the obligation of it, nor juſtify the violation of this great and natural law. Our bleſſed Saviour in his religion hath declared nothing to the prejudice of it; but on the contrary hath heightened our obligation to it, as much as is poſſible, by telling us, that *the Son of man came not to deſtroy mens lives, but to ſave them.*

So that *they know not what manner of ſpirit they are of,* who will *kill men to do God ſervice*; and to advance his cauſe and religion in the world, will break through all obligations of nature, and civil ſociety, and diſturb the peace and happineſs of mankind.

Nor did our Saviour by any thing in his religion deſign to releaſe men from the obligation of natural and civil duties. He had (as one would imagine) as much power as the Pope; but yet he depoſed none of the princes of this world, nor did abſolve their ſubjects from their fidelity and obedience to them, for their oppoſition to his religion; he aſſumed no ſuch power to himſelf, (no, not *in ordine ad ſpiritualia*) nor, that ever we read of, did he give it to any other. Whence then comes his pretended vicar to have this authority? And yet the horrid attempt of this day was firſt deſigned, and afterwards carried on in proſecution of the Pope's bull of excommunication, and was not ſo much the effect of the deſpair and diſcontent of that party here in *England*, as the natural conſequence of their doctrines of extirpating hereticks and depoſing kings, and abſolving ſubjects from their allegiance to them.

No zeal for any poſitive inſtitution in religion can juſtify the violation of the natural law, the precepts whereof are of primary and indiſpenſable obligation. The Pope's ſupremacy is not ſo clear as the duty of obedience to civil government; nor is tranſubſtantiation ſo plainly revealed in ſcripture, as it is both in nature and ſcripture, that we ſhould do no murder.

And

And yet how many thouſands have been put to death, becauſe they could not underſtand this hard word, and believe this impoſſible thing! And yet if the ſupremacy of the Pope were clearly of divine right, and the doctrine of tranſubſtantiation as plain as the inſtitution of the ſacrament: yet theſe being but poſitive matters in religion, there would be no reaſon to kill men for not underſtanding and believing theſe things; nay it would be contrary to religion to do it; becauſe the law of mercy and humanity, which is the law of nature, ought not to be violated for the promoting of any poſitive inſtitution; and God hath plainly ſaid, that *he will have mercy rather than ſacrifice*; yea rather than the ſacrifice of the maſs, if it were what they pretend it is, the offering of the natural body and blood of Chriſt; becauſe it would be needleſs: for propitiation of ſin being once made by Chriſt's *offering himſelf once for all* upon the croſs; *there needs no more ſacrifice for ſin.* Nay, I will go further yet; I had rather never adminiſter the ſacrament, nor ever receive it, than take away any man's life about it; becauſe the ſacrament is but a poſitive rite and inſtitution of the Chriſtian religion, and God prefers mercy, which is a duty of natural religion, before any rite or inſtitution whatſoever. Beſides, that all acts of malice and cruelty are directly contrary to the particular nature and deſign of this bleſſed ſacrament, which is to commemorate the ſufferings of the Son of God for our ſakes, and to give us an example of the greateſt love that ever was, and thereby to excite us to the imitation of it.

2. What hath been ſaid gives us a right notion and character of that church and religion, which prefers the poſitive rites and inſtitutions of religion, and the obſervance of them, to thoſe duties which are of natural and eternal obligation, mercy and goodneſs, fidelity and juſtice; and which for the ſake of a pretended article of religion, or rite of worſhip, (which if it were certain that they were revealed, and inſtituted by God, are yet merely poſitive) will *break the greateſt of God's commandments, and teach men ſo.*

It is too plain to be denied, that the principles and pre-

precepts of natural religion were never ſo effectually undermined, and the morality of the Chriſtian religion never ſo intolerably corrupted and debauched, by any thing that ever yet had the face of religion in the world, as by the allowed doctrines and practices of the church of Rome; and this out of a blind and furious zeal for ſome imaginary doctrines and rites of the Chriſtian religion, which at the beſt are of mere poſitive inſtitution, and of the ſame rank among Chriſtians, that ſacrifices were in the Jewiſh religion. For which we need go no further for an inſtance, than in the occaſion of this day's ſolemnity; upon which day, (about fourſcore years ago) there was deſigned a mighty ſacrifice indeed, the greateſt and richeſt burnt offering that ever was pretended to be offered up to Almighty God, by thoſe of any religion whatſoever; not *the blood of bulls and goats*, but of King, and Princes, and Nobles, more in value than *thouſands of rams, and ten thouſands of rivers of oil*; than *all the beaſts of the foreſt, and the cattle upon a thouſand hills*.

Here was a prodigious ſacrifice indeed, but where was mercy? the thing God chiefly deſires, and which above all other things is acceptable to him: No mercy, not even to thoſe of their own religion, whom theſe nice and tender caſuiſts, after a ſolemn debate of the caſe, had reſolved to involve in the ſame common deſtruction with the reſt; rather no mercy, than that this ſacrifice which their mad zeal had prompted them to, ſhould be omitted.

To conclude, They that can do ſuch inhuman things, and think them to be religion, do not underſtand the nature of it, but had need to be taught the firſt rudiments of natural religion; that natural duties are not to be violated upon pretence, no, not for the ſake of poſitive inſtitutions; becauſe natural religion is the foundation of that which is inſtituted; and therefore to violate any natural duty for the ſake of that which is inſtituted, is for religion to undermine and blow up itſelf. Let thoſe who *do ſuch things, and teach men ſo, go and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not ſacrifice.*

SER-

SERMON CIV.

Chriſtianity doth not deſtroy, but perfect the law of Moſes.

MATTH. v. 17.

Think not that I am come to deſtroy the law or the Prophets. I am not come to deſtroy, but to fulfil.

The firſt ſermon on this text.

THere is no ſaying in the whole goſpel, which the Jews did ſo frequently object to the Chriſtians as this of our bleſſed Saviour, as if his words and actions were plainly repugnant, and contrary to one another: for when it is evident, ſay they, that he took away ſo many ceremonies, purifications, diſtinctions of meats, ſacrifices, judicial laws, and many other things; yet he ſays, *he came not to deſtroy the law or the Prophets*; ſo that it is plain, that he did throw down the law of Moſes, and in ſo doing contradicted his own ſaying, that he did not intend to *deſtroy the law*. To clear our Saviour's words of this objection, it will be requiſite to conſider the ſcope and deſign of his diſcourſe in this chapter; by which we ſhall fully underſtand the ſenſe and meaning of theſe words in the text.

Our Saviour in this ſermon, (which contains the ſum and ſubſtance of his religion) doth earneſtly recommend to his diſciples and followers, and ſtrictly enjoins the perfect practice of all goodneſs and virtue, declaring to them, that he came to bring in and eſtabliſh that righteouſneſs, which the Jewiſh religion indeed aimed at, but through the weakneſs and imperfection of that diſpenſation, was not able to effect and accompliſh. And to take away all ſuſpicion of a deſign to contradict the former revelations of God,

God, made to the Jews by Moſes and the Prophets, or to deſtroy their divine authority, by carrying on a deſign contrary to them, I ſay, to prevent any imagination of this kind, he does here in the text expreſly declare the contrary: *Think not,* &c. intimating that ſome either did, or at leaſt might be apt to ſuſpect, that his deſign was to deſtroy the obligation of the law, and to undermine the authority of Moſes and the Prophets; to free them from this jealouſy, he declares plainly, that he had no ſuch thought and intention, it was far from him.

I am not come to deſtroy, καταλῦσαι, *to abrogate,* or *diſſolve the law,* to encourage men to the breach and violation of it; for the word is of the ſame ſenſe with λύειν, at the 19th ver. *Whoſoever ſhall break one of theſe leaſt commandments*; and with καταργῆσαι, Rom. iii. 31 νόμον οὖν καταργοῦμεν; *do we then make void the law by faith?* Which is the ſame queſtion with that of the ſame Apoſtle, Gal. iii. 21. *Is the law then againſt the promiſes of God?* that is, *are the law and the goſpel contrary? do they contradict one another?* So that the meaning of our Saviour's declaration is this, that he was not come to diſſolve, and abrogate, and make void the law, or to encourage men to the breach of it; that the precepts of his religion were in no wiſe contrary to thoſe of the law and the Prophets, did not thwart and oppoſe them, or any ways contradict the main deſign and intention of *the law and the Prophets*; that is, of the Jewiſh religion; for ſo *the law and the Prophets* do frequently ſignify, Matt. vii. 12. *Therefore all things whatſoever ye would that men ſhould do to you, do ye even ſo to them*; *for this is the law and the Prophets*; that is, this is the main ſcope and intention of what your religion contained in *the law and the Prophets* teacheth, concerning your duty to one another. So likewiſe, Matt. xxii. 40. *On theſe two commandments hang all the law and the Prophets*; that is, this is the ſum of all the duties of religion; to theſe two laws, all that the Jewiſh religion teacheth may be referred. *I am not come to deſtroy, but to fulfil*; to carry on the ſame deſign which was intended

tended by the Jewiſh religion, and to perfect and accompliſh it; to ſupply all the defects and weakneſſes and imperfections of that diſpenſation: This is the plain meaning of this caution and declaration of our Saviour's, *Think not*, &c.

For the clearing of this matter, viz. That the deſign of our Saviour's doctrine and religion is not contrary to thoſe former revelations, which God made to the Jews by Moſes and the Prophets; this will evidently appear, whether we conſider the prophecies and predictions of the Old Teſtament, or the laws and precepts therein contained.

Firſt, The prophecies and predictions of the Old Teſtament, our Saviour came not to contradict and overthrow theſe; but to fulfil them. The chief predictions of the law and the Prophets were concerning the Meſſias, and his ſpiritual kingdom. In the law it was foretold, *that God would raiſe to them a Prophet like unto Moſes, whom they ought to hear and obey; and to him all the Prophets of the Old Teſtament gave witneſs*, foretelling the time of his coming, his extraction, the manner and circumſtances of his birth, the purity and efficacy of his doctrine, the actions and miracles of his life, his paſſion, death and burial, with the particular circumſtances of them, his reſurrection from the dead, and his aſcenſion into heaven, and exaltation at the right hand of God; ſo that this part of the law and the Prophets he did accompliſh and fulfil in a moſt eminent and remarkable manner; all things that the Prophets had foretold concerning the Meſſias, were punctually made good in the perſon, and actions, and ſufferings of our Saviour.

Secondly, As to the laws and precepts of the Jewiſh religion, the doctrine and the laws of Chriſtianity did not claſh with them; nor properly abrogate them, and make them void, eſpecially as to the moral precepts, which were the very life and ſpirit, the ultimate ſcope and deſign of that religion; nay, ſo far was it from doing ſo, that the main and proper intention of Chriſtianity, was to clear, and eſtabliſh that which was the main deſign of *the law and the Prophets*,

phets, to perfect the law in this part, and to raiſe and advance morality to its higheſt pitch, to ſupply all the defects and imperfections of the Jewiſh religion, and to make men much better than that weak and imperfect inſtitution was able to do. This was the great deſign of Chriſtianity; and it is very probable that our Saviour had a principal, if not a ſole reſpect to the precepts of the moral law, when he here ſays, that *he came not to deſtroy the law and the Prophets, but to perfect and fulfil them*; as I ſhall have occaſion by and by to ſhew more at large.

But that we may give a full anſwer to the objection of the Jews againſt this ſaying of our Saviour's, I ſhall ſhew that he did not come to thwart and contradict, and properly to abrogate and make void the Jewiſh law in any part of it, neither the civil and judicial, nor the ritual and ceremonial, much leſs the moral and natural precepts of it. This is more than I think to be abſolutely neceſſary, to reconcile this ſaying of our Saviour with the reſt of his doctrine and actions; for though he had properly abrogated the ceremonial law, and in no ſenſe fulfilled it; yet, notwithſtanding this, it may be true, that he *came not to deſtroy the law and the Prophets*; that is, to deſtroy the obligation of moral duties, which he ſpeaks of in this chapter, and elſewhere declares to be the ultimate ſcope, the ſum and ſubſtance of the law and the Prophets. For if the ceremonial law was not deſigned by God to be perpetual, but to give way to a more perfect diſpenſation; then our Saviour did no way thwart and contradict the law and the Prophets, by abrogating the ceremonial law, at that time, when God deſigned that a period ſhould be put to it. But yet for the fuller ſatisfaction to this objection, I ſhall ſhew that our Saviour did not properly abrogate any part of the Jewiſh law, no, not the ritual and ceremonial part of it; but did fulfil it.

Firſt, Not their civil and judicial laws. Theſe in the original intention of them, were not laws deſigned for mankind, but ſuited and fitted to the diſpoſition and temper, the condition and circumſtances of a particular people and nation; to theſe our Saviour

viour taught obedience, and paid it himſelf, and never did any thing contrary to them, nor in the leaſt weaken the obligation of them; but they continued in full force, till that nation and commonwealth was diſſolved. So that theſe laws were no way impeached or abrogated by the Chriſtian religion; but they fell for want of a ſubject to exerciſe their power upon, and becauſe the people that were to be governed by them were deſtroyed or diſſipated; and though they neither are, nor ever were obligatory to other nations, as given by Moſes, and as they were the peculiar laws of a particular nation; yet the natural reaſon and equity of them, ſo far as it concerned mankind, is duly conſidered and regarded by us, and many of theſe laws are adopted into the laws of moſt Chriſtian nations. It is plain then, that this part of the Jewiſh law received no prejudice by Chriſtianity, but continued in full force, ſo long as that nation and commonwealth laſted, which was to be governed by it.

Secondly, As to the ritual and ceremonial part of the Jewiſh law, which conſiſted in circumciſion and purifications, and ſacrifices, in diſtinction of meats and times, and innumerable other rites and obſervances; this was not properly abrogated and made void by the coming of Chriſt, but fulfilled and made good by him. The rites and ceremonies of the law, were the types and ſhadows of thoſe future good things which were promiſed under the goſpel, a kind of rude draught of a better and more perfect inſtitution, which was deſigned, and at laſt finiſhed and perfected by the Chriſtian religion. This account the Apoſtle gives of the legal rites and obſervances, Col. ii. 16, 17. *Let no man judge you in meat or in drink, or in reſpect of a holy-day, or of the new moon, or of the ſabbath-days, which are a ſhadow of things to come, but the body is of Chriſt*; that is, he is the ſubſtance and reality of all thoſe things, which were ſhadowed and figured by thoſe legal obſervances. And ſo the Apoſtle to the Hebrews calls the Prieſts and ſacrifices of the law, the *examples and ſhadows of heavenly things*, chap. viii. 5. and

5. and ſo chap. x. 1. *the law having a ſhadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things*, that is, being but an obſcure type, and not a perfect repreſentation of the bleſſings and benefits of the Goſpel, which we now have in truth and reality. Now reaſon will tell us, that the laws concerning theſe types and ſhadows, were only to continue till the ſubſtance of the things ſignified by them ſhould come, and that they would be of no longer uſe, when that more perfect inſtitution, which was figured by them, ſhould take place, and then they would expire, and become void of themſelves, becauſe the reaſon and uſe of them ceaſing, they muſt neceſſarily fall.

But they did not expire immediately upon the coming of Chriſt, and therefore he himſelf ſubmitted to theſe laws, ſo long as they continued in force; he was circumciſed, and preſented in the temple, and performed all other rites required by the law, that firſt covenant to which theſe laws and ordinances belonged, continuing in force till the ratification of the ſecond covenant by the death of Chriſt, and then theſe laws expired, or rather were fulfilled, and had their accompliſhment in the ſacrifice of Chriſt, which made all the ſacrifices and other rites of the Jewiſh religion needleſs, and of no uſe for the future; Chriſt having by this *one ſacrifice of himſelf, perfected for ever them that are ſanctified*, as the ſame Apoſtle ſpeaks, Heb. x. 14. So that Chriſt did not properly abrogate and repeal thoſe rites and ceremonial laws; but they having continued as long as they were deſigned to do, and there was any uſe of them, they abated and ceaſed of themſelves.

And that the death of Chriſt was the time of their expiration, becauſe then the new covenant took place, St. Paul expreſly tells us, Eph. ii. 15. *having aboliſhed or voided in his fleſh the law of commandments contained in ordinances*; and this, ver. 16. he is ſaid to have done *by his croſs*; and more plainly, Col. ii. 14. *blotting out the hand-writing of ordinances which was againſt us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his croſs.*

So

So that ye ſee that even the ceremonial law was not ſo properly abrogated by the ſacrifice and death of Chriſt, but rather had its accompliſhment, and attained its end, in the ſacrifice of Chriſt, which by the eternal efficacy of it to the expiation of ſin, and the purifying of our conſciences, hath made all the ſacrifices and waſhings, and other rites of the ceremonial law, for ever needleſs and ſuperfluous.

Thirdly, But eſpecially as to the moral law, and thoſe precepts which are of natural and perpetual obligation, our Saviour did not come either to diſſolve, or to leſſen and ſlacken the obligation of them.

And of this I told you our Saviour doth principally, if not ſolely, ſpeak here in the text, as will appear to any one that ſhall attentively conſider the ſcope of this diſcourſe. In the beginning of his ſermon he promiſeth bleſſing to thoſe, and thoſe only, who were endowed with thoſe virtues which are required by the precepts of the moral law, or comprehended in them; and then he tells them, that Chriſtians muſt be very eminent and conſpicuous for the practice of them, ver. 16. *Let your light ſo ſhine before men, that they may ſee your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*; and then he cautions them not to entertain any ſuch imaginations, as if he intended to diſſolve the obligation of the law, and to free men from the practice of moral duties, which probably ſome might have ſuggeſted againſt him; *think not that I am come to deſtroy the law and the Prophets*; as if he had ſaid, you cannot entertain any ſuch conceit, if you conſider that the precepts which I inculcate upon you, and thoſe virtues, the practice whereof I recommend to you, are the ſame which are contained in *the law and the Prophets*. So that I am ſo far from croſſing the main deſign of the *law and the Prophets*, and taking away the obligation of moral duties enjoined by the Jewiſh religion, that I come purpoſely to carry on the ſame deſign to further perfection, to give a more perfect and clear law, and to give a greater enforcement and encouragement to the practice of moral duties; theſe were always the ſum and ſubſtance of religion, the

ultimate deſign of *the law and the Prophets,* and therefore I am ſo far from diſcharging men from the obligation of the moral precepts of the law, that I come to bind them more ſtrongly upon you. And *verily I ſay unto you,* that is, I ſolemnly declare, *that whoſoever ſhall break one of theſe leaſt commandments, and ſhall teach men ſo, he ſhall be called the leaſt in the kingdom of heaven*; that is, he ſhall in no wiſe enter therein. You think the Scribes and Phariſees very pious and excellent men, and to have attained to a high pitch of righteouſneſs; *but I ſay unto you, that except your righteouſneſs ſhall exceed the righteouſneſs of the Scribes and Phariſees, ye ſhall in no wiſe enter into the kingdom of heaven.* And then he inſtanceth in ſeveral precepts of the moral law, which in the letter of them, eſpecially as they were interpreted by the teachers of the law among the Jews, were very much ſhort of that righteouſneſs and perfection which he now requires of his diſciples and followers. So that his whole diſcourſe is about precepts, and obligations of the moral law, and not a word concerning the ritual and ceremonial law; which makes me very prone to think, that our Saviour's meaning in the text is this, that his religion was ſo far from thwarting and oppoſing that which was the main deſign of the law and the Prophets, that is, of the Jewiſh religion, that the principal intention of Chriſtianity was to advance the practice of goodneſs and virtue, by ſtrengthening the obligation of moral duties, and giving us a more perfect law and rule of life, and offering better arguments and greater encouragements to the obedience of this law. Therefore, for the fuller explication and illuſtration of this matter, I ſhall endeavour to clear theſe three points:

Firſt, That the main and ultimate deſign of the law and the Prophets, was to engage men to the practice of moral duties, that is, of real and ſubſtantial goodneſs.

Secondly, That the law of Moſes, or the diſpenſation of the Jewiſh religion, was comparatively very weak and inſufficient to this purpoſe.

Thirdly,

Thirdly, That the Chriſtian religion hath ſupplied all the defects, and weakneſſes and imperfections of that diſpenſation. Theſe three particulars will fully clear our Saviour's meaning in this text.

Firſt, That the main and ultimate deſign of the law and the prophets, was to engage men to the practice of moral duties, that is, of real and ſubſtantial goodneſs, conſiſting in thoſe virtues which our Saviour mentions at the beginning of this ſermon, humility, and meekneſs, and mercy, and righteouſneſs, and purity, and peaceableneſs. This our Saviour more than once tells us was the ſum and ſubſtance, the main ſcope and deſign of the whole doctrine of the law and the Prophets, Matth. vii. 12. *Therefore all things whatſoever ye would that men ſhould do unto you, do ye even ſo unto them, for this is the law and the Prophets.* And Matth. xxii. 40. That the love of God and our neighbour, thoſe two great commands, to which all moral duties are reduced, are the two great hinges of the Jewiſh religion, *on theſe two hang all the law and the Prophets*; St. Paul calls love, *the fulfilling of the whole law*, Rom. xiii. 10. St. James, *the perfect and the royal law*, as that which hath a ſovereign influence upon all parts of religion. And therefore the Apoſtle, *Rom.* iii. 21. tells us, that this more perfect righteouſneſs which was brought in by the goſpel, or the Chriſtian religion, is *witneſſed by the law and the Prophets.* And indeed the Prophets every where do ſlight and undervalue the ritual and ceremonial part of religion, in compariſon of the practice of moral duties. Iſa. i. 11. *To what purpoſe is the multitude of your ſacrifices unto me? bring no more vain oblations; your new moons and your appointed feaſts my ſoul hateth.* But what then are the things that are acceptable to God? He tells us at the 16th ver. *Waſh ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, ceaſe to do evil, learn to do well; ſeek judgment, relieve the oppreſſed, judge the fatherleſs, plead for the widow.* And by the Prophet Jeremiah, God tells that people, that the buſineſs of ſacrifices was not the thing primarily deſigned by God, but obedience to the

moral law. The ritual law came in upon occasion, for the prevention of idolatry, and by way of condescension to the temper of that people; and thus Maimonides and the learned Jews understand these words, Jer. vii. 22, 23. *I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices; but this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and walk in all the ways that I have commanded, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people.* So likewise in the Prophet Hosea, God plainly prefers the moral before the ritual part of religion, as that which was principally designed and intended by him, Hos. vi. 6. *I desired mercy and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings*; but most plainly and expressly Mic. vi. 6. *Wherewithal shall I come before the Lord? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, and ten thousand of rivers of oil? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?* These it seems were the things which God stood upon, and required of men, even under that imperfect dispensation; and these are the very things which the Christian religion doth so strictly enjoin and command; so that this righteousness which the gospel requires, *was witnessed by the law and the Prophets.* I proceed to the

Second point, That the law of Moses, or the dispensation of the Jewish religion, was comparatively very weak, and insufficient to make men truly good, and for the promoting of real and inward righteousness. It gave laws indeed to this purpose, but those not so clear and perfect, or at least not so clearly understood as they are now under the gospel; and it made no express promises of inward grace, and assistance, to quicken and strengthen us in the doing of our duty; it made no explicit promises of any blessing and reward to the doing of our duty beyond this life; so that the best and most powerful arguments and encouragements to obedience, were either

wholly

wholly wanting, or very obſcurely revealed under this diſpenſation.

And this inſufficiency of the Jewiſh diſpenſation, both to our juſtification and ſanctification, to the reconciling of us to God, and the making of us really good, the Apoſtle frequently inculcates in the New Teſtament; St. Paul Acts xiii. 38, 39. *Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveneſs of ſins, and by him all that believe are juſtified from all thoſe things, from which ye could not be juſtified by the law of Moſes*; and Rom. viii. 3. *What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the fleſh*; that is, by reaſon of the carnality of that diſpenſation, conſiſting in the purification of the body, Gal. iii. 21. he calls it a law unfit to give life; *If there had been a law which could have given life, verily righteouſneſs had been by the law.* And the Apoſtle to the Hebrews, chap. viii. 6, 7, 8, *&c.* finds fault with the diſpenſation of the law, for the lowneſs and meanneſs of its promiſes, being only of temporal good things; and for want of conferring an inward and a powerful principle to enable men to obedience; *but now hath he obtained* (ſpeaking of Chriſt) *a more excellent miniſtry, by how much alſo he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was eſtabliſhed upon better promiſes; for if that firſt covenant had been faultleſs, then ſhould no place have been ſought for a ſecond*; and this ſecond and better covenant he tells us, was foretold by the Prophets of the Old Teſtament; *for finding fault with them, he ſaith, Behold the days come, ſaith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the houſe of Iſrael, and with the houſe of Judah; not according to the covenant which I made with their fathers. For this is the covenant which I will make with the houſe of Iſrael after thoſe days, ſaith the Lord, I will put my laws into their minds, and write them in their hearts.* And chap. x. 1. 4. he ſhews the inefficacy of their ſacrifices for the real expiation of ſin, *the law having* but *a ſhadow of good things to come, and not the lively repreſentation of the things* themſelves, *can never with thoſe ſacrifices which they*

they offered year by year continually, make the comers thereunto perfect; for it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins.

I should now have proceeded to the third particular; namely, that the Christian religion hath supplied all the defects and weakness and imperfection of the Jewish dispensation; but that I shall not now enter upon, but make one plain inference from the substance of what I have already discoursed upon this argument.

If our Saviour came not to dissolve and loosen the obligation of moral duties, but to confirm and establish it, and to enforce and bind the practice of these duties more strongly upon us, then they do widely and wilfully mistake the design of Christianity, who teach that it dischargeth men from the obligation of the moral law, which is the fundamental and avowed principle of the Antinomian doctrine, but directly contrary to this declaration of our Saviour in the text, that he *came not to destroy the law and the Prophets, but* to perfect and *fulfil them*; (for to take away the obligation of a law, is plainly to destroy and make it void;) and contrary to the Apostle's solemn resolution of this matter, Rom. iii. 31. *Do we then make void the law through faith?* that is, doth the gospel destroy and take away the obligation of the law? *God forbid, yea we establish the law*; the Christian religion is so far from designing or doing any such thing, that it gives new strength and force to it.

But surely they that teach this doctrine, did never duly consider that terrible threatening of our Saviour after the text, which seems to be so directly levelled at them; *Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven*; for how can men more effectually teach the violation, not only of the least, but of the greatest of God's commandments, than by declaring that the gospel hath set men free from the obligation of the moral law? which is in effect to say, that Christians may act contrary to all the duties of morality, that is, do the most impious things in the world, without any offence against

God,

God, and notwithſtanding this, continue to be his children, and highly in the favour of God.

And all the ſecurity they have againſt this impious conſequence, is that weak and ſlender pretence, "that "gratitude and love to God will preſerve them from "making this ill uſe of the grace of the goſpel, and "oblige them to abſtain from ſin, and to endea- "vour to pleaſe God as much as any law could "do." But then they do not conſider the nonſenſe of this; for there can be no ſuch thing as ſin, if the obligation of the law be taken away, for *where there is no law, there* can be *no tranſgreſſion*, as the Apoſtle and common reaſon likewiſe tells us; ſo that the law being removed and taken away, all actions become indifferent, and one thing is not more a ſin or offence againſt God than another. And what then is it they mean that gratitude will oblige men to, or preſerve them from? when there can be no ſuch thing as ſin or duty, as pleaſing or offending God, if there be no law to oblige us to the one, or reſtrain us from the other.

And what is, if this be not, to *turn the grace of God into wantonneſs*, and to make Chriſtian liberty a cloak for all ſorts of ſins? A man cannot do a greater deſpite to the Chriſtian religion, nor take a more effectual courſe to bring it into contempt, and to make it to be hiſſed out of the world, than to repreſent it as a lewd and licentious doctrine, which gives men a perfect diſcharge from all the duties of morality, and obligeth them only to believe confidently, that Chriſt hath purchaſed for them a liberty to do what they will, and that upon thoſe terms, and no other, they are ſecured of the favour of God in this world, and eternal ſalvation in the other. This is the ſum and the plain reſult of the Antinomian doctrine, the moſt pernicious hereſy, and moſt directly deſtructive of the great end and deſign of Chriſtianity, that ever yet was broached in the world. But *ye have not ſo learned Chriſt, if ſo be ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jeſus, that ye put off concerning your former converſation, the old man, which is corrupt according*

cording to the deceitful luſts, and that ye be renewed in the ſpirit of your mind, and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteouſneſs, and true holineſs.

SERMON CV.

Chriſtianity doth not deſtroy, but perfect the law of Moſes.

MATTH. v. 17.

Think not that I am come to deſtroy the law or the Prophets. I am not come to deſtroy, but to fulfil.

The ſecond ſermon on this text.

I Have conſidered this ſaying of our Saviour's with reſpect to the moral law, and thoſe precepts which are of natural and perpetual force, and that our Saviour did not come either to diſſolve or looſen the obligation of them; for the illuſtration of which, I propounded to clear theſe three points.

Firſt, That the main and ultimate deſign of the law and the Prophets, was to engage men to the practice of moral duties, that is, of real and ſubſtantial goodneſs.

Secondly, That the law of Moſes, or the diſpenſation of the Jewiſh religion, was comparatively very weak, and inſufficient to make men truly good, and ineffectual to promote inward and real righteouſneſs. Theſe two points I have ſpoken to. I ſhall now proceed to the

Third, namely, That the Chriſtian religion doth ſupply all the defects and weakneſſes and imperfections of the Jewiſh diſpenſation.

The Jewiſh religion had very conſiderable advantages above the mere light of nature, which was all that the heathen world had to conduct them towards eternal happineſs; the Jews had the knowledge of the

the one true God, and very ſignal and particular teſtimonies of the divine Providence, which did naturally tend to beget in them good hopes of a future life, and the rewards of another world; they had the natural law revealed, and the main precepts of it written with God's own hand, and by Moſes delivered to them; by which means they had a more certain and diſtinct knowledge of their duty: they had Prophets frequently ſent to them, to admoniſh them of their duty, and to exhort them to repentance, and to warn them of approaching judgments: They had good encouragement given to hope for the pardon of ſin, by God's appointment of ſeveral ways of expiation; which how unlikely ſoever they were to be available to the effectual expiation of ſin, yet they did ſignify that the divine nature was placable, and did ſeem to figure ſome more effectual way, deſigned by God for that purpoſe, that ſhould be exhibited in due time. And finally they had moſt expreſs promiſes and threatenings of temporal bleſſings and judgments, to encourage them in their obedience, and to deter them from the tranſgreſſion of God's laws. Theſe advantages the Jews plainly had above the reſt of the world, God did not deal ſo with other nations, neither had the Heathen ſuch a knowledge of God's laws.

But notwithſtanding this, the Jewiſh religion was very ſhort and defective, very weak and ineffectual to the great end of righteouſneſs and true holineſs, and to raiſe men to that perfection of goodneſs, of which human nature, through the grace of God, is capable; and therefore there wanted a more perfect inſtitution, to ſupply the defects and weakneſs, and imperfection even of that divine revelation which God had made to the Jews, and really to effect and accompliſh that which the Jewiſh religion attempted and aimed at, and was but, as I may ſay, rudely begun under that imperfect inſtitution. And this the Goſpel, or the Chriſtian religion revealed by our Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt hath fully effected, as will evidently appear by a particular ſurvey, and conſideration of the main defects of the Jewiſh religion, which

which I ſhall ſhew to be all perfectly made up by the revelation of the Goſpel, and the doctrine of Chriſtianity, in theſe following particulars:

Firſt, It was a great defect of the Jewiſh religion, that a conſiderable part of it was merely external, concerning the purification of the body and the fleſh, and only figurative of that inward purity and real righteouſneſs, which renders men truly good, and like to God; for which reaſon the Jewiſh inſtitution is by the Apoſtle to the Hebrews called *the law of a carnal commandment*, Heb. vii. 16. and Chap. ix. 10. is ſaid *to conſiſt only* (that is chiefly) *in meats and drinks, and divers waſhings, and carnal ordinances impoſed on them until the time of reformation*; that is, till the Meſſias ſhould come, and give ſuch laws as ſhould really tend to reform the hearts and lives of men; and therefore theſe laws and ordinances are called *poor pitiful elements*, and *the rudiments of the world*, fitted rather for children in underſtanding and goodneſs, than to bring men to any maturity and perfection in goodneſs. All their rites of purification did *only ſanctify to the purifying of the fleſh*; but *did not purge the conſcience from dead works*, as the Apoſtle to the Hebrews ſpeaks, Chap. ix. 13, 14. *they could not make thoſe that performed and obſerved them perfect, as pertaining to the conſcience*, ver. 9. that is, theſe laws had no effect upon the minds of men, to make them really better, to cure them of their moral defects and impurities, their ſins and vices.

But the Chriſtian inſtitution doth perfectly ſupply this defect, by taking us off from thoſe carnal and external obſervances, and principally requiring that we *worſhip God in ſpirit and in truth*; by giving us ſuch laws as wholly tend to advance real and ſubſtantial goodneſs, purity and holineſs of heart and life, ſuch as mainly tend to reform the minds and manners of men, and to make us like to that holy and perfect Being whom we worſhip: And, beſides an external, humble and reverent demeanour of ourſelves in the worſhip of God, (to which natural religion doth likewiſe direct) Chriſtianity hath only inſtituted

ſtituted two ſolemn external rites, *viz.* baptiſm and the Lord's ſupper; whereby we ſolemnly oblige ourſelves to the practice of all virtue and goodneſs; I ſay, only theſe two, that by the multitude of external obſervances, Chriſtians might not be taken off from the minding of the real and ſubſtantial duties of religion.

And therefore the church of Rome have extremely abated and weakened the force of Chriſtianity upon the hearts and lives of men, by amuſing them with external rites, which they have multiplied to that exceſſive degree, as to make the yoke of Chriſt really heavier than that of Moſes, and the Chriſtian religion a more external and carnal commandment than that of the law, and by this means have diverted and taken off the minds of men from the main deſign of Chriſtianity, inſomuch that they are ſo employed and taken up with matters of external ceremony, that they have no leiſure to think of being good men, and to mind the great and ſubſtantial duties and virtues of the Chriſtian life; ſo that they have ſpoiled the Chriſtian religion of one of its chief excellencies and perfections, I mean the ſimplicity of its worſhip, which they have now incumbered with ſo many fooliſh and frivolous rites and obſervances, as do not only render it more burthenſome, but leſs apt to make men inwardly and ſubſtantially good, than even Judaiſm itſelf. This is ſo true and ſo viſible, that the wiſer and better ſort of them have complained of it for ſeveral ages, and ſtill do, as much as they dare for fear of the Inquiſition, or ſome other cenſure.

Secondly, Another defect of the law of Moſes was, that it did not give encouragement enough to repentance, by declaring and aſſuring to us any certain way and method for the expiation and forgiveneſs of ſin. This the rites of all religions aimed at, and pretended to; but were very ineffectual to that end. The heathen ſacrifices, and all the cruel and barbarous rites belonging to them, did all pretend to be ſo many ways of appeaſing the offended Deity, and of making atonement and expiation for ſin; and the

ſacrifices of the Jews were inſtituted by God himſelf, to make an external and legal expiation, and to be types and ſhadows of *a better* and *more perfect ſacrifice*, which ſhould really expiate ſin; but even this was very darkly and imperfectly diſcovered to them; beſides, that the expiations of the law did only extend to the leaſt ſorts of ſins, thoſe of ignorance and inadvertency, but not at all to preſumptuous ſins, and ſuch as were committed with a high hand, nor to wilful and deliberate ſins, except in ſome very few and rare caſes, particularly mentioned in the law; ſo that though a great part of the religious rites both of the Pagan and Jewiſh religion, aimed at the expiation of ſin, yet were they really ineffectual to that end; and upon the whole matter, mankind, though they conceived good hope of God's mercy and forgiveneſs in caſe of repentance, (*Who can tell if God will, turn and repent, and turn away from his anger?*) yet they were unacquainted with any certain and effectual means to that purpoſe.

It remains then, that this great bleſſing of the forgiveneſs of ſins, was never ſufficiently declared and aſſured to mankind, but through Jeſus Chriſt in the goſpel. So St. Paul expreſly aſſerts, Acts xiii. 38, 39. *Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveneſs of ſins, and by him all that believe are juſtified from all things, from which ye could not be juſtified by the law of Moſes.* The goſpel hath provided an expiation for all ſins in general, and that by a ſacrifice of ineſtimable value, *the blood of the Son of God.* And this is a mighty encouragement to repentance, and one moſt effectual means to reclaim men from their ſins, to be aſſured that they are indemnified for what is paſt. And this the Apoſtle means, when he ſays, Gal. iii. 13. that *Chriſt hath redeemed us from the curſe of the law, being made a curſe for us*; that is, whereas the law left ſinners, as to thoſe ſins which ſtood moſt in need of pardon, under a curſe, having provided no expiation for them, Chriſt hath redeemed them from that curſe, by making a general expiation for ſin; and in this

ſenſe

ſenſe it is that the author to the Hebrews ſays, chap. ix. 15. that Chriſt died for *the redemption of the tranſgreſſions that were under the firſt covenant*; that is, for thoſe ſins for which the covenant of the law had provided no way of forgiveneſs; and therefore St. John ſays emphatically, 1 John i. 7. that *the blood of Jeſus Chriſt cleanſeth us from all ſin.*

Thirdly, The law did not afford ſufficiently plain and certain rules and directions for a good life. As the corruption and degeneracy of mankind grew worſe, ſo the light of nature waxed dimmer and dimmer, and the rule of good and evil was more doubtful and uncertain, and that in very conſiderable inſtances of our duty. The law of Moſes was peculiar to the Jews: and even to them, who only had the benefit and advantage of it, it did not give clear and perfect light and direction as to moral duties, and thoſe things which are of an eternal and immutable reaſon and goodneſs. And therefore our Saviour in this ſermon explains it to a greater perfection than it was underſtood to have among the Jews, or the letter of it ſeemed to intend, and hath not only forbidden ſeveral things permitted by the law, as divorce, and retaliation of injuries; but hath heightened our duty in ſeveral inſtances of it, requiring us to love our enemies, and to forgive the greateſt injuries and provocations, though never ſo often repeated, and not only not to revenge them, but to requite them with good turns; which were not underſtood by mankind to be laws before, but yet when duly conſidered, are very agreeable to right reaſon, and the ſenſe of the wiſeſt and beſt men. So that the Chriſtian religion hath not only fixed and determined our duty, and brought it to a greater certainty, but hath raiſed it to a greater perfection, and rendered it every way fit to bring the minds of men to a more divine temper, and a more reaſonable and perfect way of ſerving God, than ever the world was inſtructed in before.

Fourthly, The promiſes and threatenings of the law were only of temporal good and evil things, which are, in compariſon of the endleſs rewards and

puniſhments of another world, but very languid and faint motives to obedience. Not but that the Jews under the law had ſuch apprehenſions of their own immortality, and of a future ſtate of happineſs and miſery after this life, as natural light ſuggeſted to them; which was in moſt but a wavering and uncertain perſuaſion, and conſequently of ſmall efficacy to engage men to their duty; but the law of Moſes added little or nothing to the clearneſs of thoſe natural notions concerning a future ſtate, and the ſtrengthening of this perſuaſion in the minds of men; it did rather ſuppoſe it, than give any new force and life to it. And for this reaſon more particularly the Apoſtle tells us, that *the law was* but *weak* to make men good; becauſe it did not work ſtrongly enough upon the hopes and fears of men by the weight of its promiſes, and the terror of its threatenings; and that for this weakneſs and imperfection of it, it was removed, and a more powerful and awakening diſpenſation brought in the place of it; Heb. vii. 18, 19. *For there is verily a diſannulling of the commandment that was before,* (that is, of the Jewiſh law) *for the weakneſs and unprofitableneſs thereof; for the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did*; that is, the covenant of the goſpel, which promiſeth eternal life. And chap. viii. 6. for this reaſon more eſpecially the Apoſtle ſays, that Chriſt had *obtained a more excellent miniſtry, being the Mediator of a better covenant, which was eſtabliſhed upon better promiſes.* And Rom. i. 16, 18. St. Paul tells us, that for this reaſon *the goſpel is the power of God unto ſalvation,* becauſe *therein the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, againſt all ungodlineſs, and unrighteouſneſs of men.* The clear revelation of a future judgment, was that which made the goſpel ſo proper and ſo powerful an inſtrument for the ſalvation of men. The great impiety of mankind, and their impenitency in it, was not ſo much to be wondered at before, while the world was in a great meaſure ignorant of the infinite danger of a wicked life; and therefore God is ſaid in ſome ſort *to overlook it; but now he commands all men every where*

where to repent, becauſe he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteouſneſs, by that Man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given aſſurance unto all men, in that he hath raiſed him from the dead, Acts xvii. 30, 31. The clear diſcovery and perfect aſſurance of a future judgment, calls loudly upon all men to leave their ſins, and turn to God.

Fifthly, The covenant of the law had no ſpiritual promiſes contained in it, of the grace and aſſiſtance of God's Holy Spirit, for the mortifying of ſin, and enabling men to their duty, and ſupporting them under ſufferings: but the goſpel is full of clear and expreſs promiſes to this purpoſe. Our Saviour hath aſſured us, *that God will give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him*, Luke xi. 13. and this the Apoſtle tells us is actually conferred upon all true Chriſtians, thoſe who do ſincerely embrace and believe the goſpel, Rom. viii. 9. *If any man have not the Spirit of Chriſt, he is none of his.* Hence the goſpel is called by the ſame Apoſtle, *the law of the ſpirit of life in Chriſt Jeſus*, ver. 2. of that chap. *The law of the ſpirit of life in Chriſt Jeſus hath made me free from the law of ſin and death*; and in the next words he tells us, that herein manifeſtly appeared the weakneſs of the law, that it left men deſtitute of this mighty help and advantage (at leaſt as to any ſpecial promiſe of it) *What the law could not do in that it was weak through the fleſh, God ſending his own Son in the likeneſs of ſinful fleſh, and by making him a ſacrifice for ſin condemned ſin in the fleſh, that the righteouſneſs of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the fleſh, but after the Spirit*; that is, that that righteouſneſs which the law aimed at, and ſignified, but was too weak to effect, might be really accompliſhed in us, *who walk not after the fleſh, but after the Spirit*; that is, who are acted and aſſiſted by a higher and better principle than men either have in nature, or the carnal diſpenſation of the law did endow men withal. And becauſe of this great defect, the law is ſaid to be a ſtate of bondage and ſervitude; and on the contrary, the goſpel, by reaſon of

this mighty advantage, is called a ſtate of adoption and liberty, ver. 15. *for ye have not received the Spirit of bondage, but the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba Father*; and 2. Cor. iii. 17. *where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.* And to this very thing St. Paul appeals, as that whereby men might judge whether the law or the goſpel were the more excellent and powerful diſpenſation, Gal. iii. 2. *This only would I learn of you, received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?* As if he had ſaid, let this one thing determine that whole matter; were ye made partakers of this great privilege and bleſſing of the Spirit, while ye were of the Jewiſh religion, or ſince ye became Chriſtians? And ver. 14. he calls it *the bleſſing of Abraham*; that is, the bleſſing promiſed to all nations by Abraham's ſeed, namely the Meſſias; *that the bleſſing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jeſus Chriſt, that we might receive the promiſe of the Spirit through faith.*

And then, for the ſupporting us under afflictions, the goſpel promiſeth an extraordinary aſſiſtance of God's Holy Spirit to us, 1 Pet. iv. 14. *If ye be reproached for the name of Chriſt, happy are ye, for the Spirit of glory and of God reſteth upon you.*

But were there no good men under the diſpenſation of the law? Yes certainly there were, and they were ſo, by the grace and aſſiſtance of God's Holy Spirit: but then this was an effect of the divine goodneſs; but not of any ſpecial promiſe, contained in that covenant, of divine grace and aſſiſtance to be conferred on all thoſe that were admitted into it. But thus it is in the new covenant of the goſpel; and therefore the law is called *a dead letter, the oldneſs of the letter*, and *the miniſtration of the letter*; in oppoſition to the goſpel, which is called the *miniſtration of the Spirit.* And this the Apoſtle lays ſpecial weight upon, as a main difference between theſe two covenants, that the firſt gave an external law, but the new covenant offers inward grace and aſſiſtance to enable men to obedience, and hath an inward and powerful efficacy upon the minds of men,

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accompanying the miniſtration of it, Heb. viii. 7, 8, 9, 10. *For if that firſt covenant had been faultleſs, then ſhould no place have been ſought for the ſecond. For finding fault with them he ſaith, Behold the days come, ſaith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the houſe of Iſrael, and with the houſe of Judah, not according to the covenant which I made with their fathers,* &c. *For this is the covenant which I will make with the houſe of Iſrael after thoſe days, ſaith the Lord; I will put my laws into their minds, and write them in their hearts.*

And of this inward grace and aſſiſtance we are further ſecured, by the powerful and prevalent and perpetual interceſſion of our High Prieſt for ſinners at the right hand of God; not like the interceſſion of the Prieſts under the law, who being ſinners themſelves, were leſs fit to intercede for others; but *we have an High Prieſt that is holy, harmleſs, undefiled,* and *ſeparate from ſinners, who by the eternal Spirit offered himſelf without ſpot to God,* to purchaſe for us thoſe bleſſings which he intercedes for. The Prieſts under the law were interceſſors upon earth; but *Chriſt is entered into heaven itſelf, now to appear in the preſence of God for us,* Heb. ix. 24. The Prieſts under the law were removed from this office by death; but *Chriſt, becauſe he continues for ever, hath an unchangeable prieſthood,* and is an everlaſting advocate and interceſſor for us, in the virtue of his moſt meritorious ſacrifice continually preſented to his Father, where he is *always at the right hand of God,* to preſent our prayers to him, and to obtain pardon of our ſins, and *grace to help in time of need,* and by his interceſſion in heaven, to procure all thoſe bleſſings to be actually conferred upon us, which he purchaſed for us by his blood upon earth; *wherefore he is able to ſave to the utmoſt all thoſe that come to God by him, ſeeing he ever liveth to make interceſſion for them,* as the ſame Apoſtle ſpeaks, Heb. 7. 25.

And thus I have, as briefly as well I could, ſhewed how the Chriſtian religion doth ſupply all the weakneſſes and defects and imperfections of the Jewiſh religion, and conſequently does in no wiſe contradict or interfere

terfere with the great deſign of the *law and the Prophets*, but hath perfected and made up whatever was weak or wanting in that inſtitution, to make men truly good, or, as the expreſſion is in the Prophet Daniel, *to bring in everlaſting righteouſneſs*; that is, to clear and confirm thoſe laws of holineſs and righteouſneſs, which are of indiſpenſible and eternal obligation.

And if this be the great deſign of our Saviour's coming, and the Chriſtian doctrine be every way fitted to advance righteouſneſs and true holineſs, and to make us as excellently good as this imperfect ſtate of mortality will admit, ſince it hath many advantages incomparably beyond any religion or inſtitution that ever was in the world, both in reſpect of the perfection of its laws, and the force of its motives and arguments to repentance, and a holy life, and in reſpect of the encouragements which it gives, and the examples which it ſets before us, and the powerful aſſiſtance which it offers to us, to enable us *to cleanſe ourſelves from all filthineſs of the fleſh and ſpirit, and to perfect holineſs in the fear of God*; what a ſhame is this to us, who are under the power of this excellent inſtitution, if the temper of our minds, and the tenor of our converſation be not in ſome meaſure anſwerable to the goſpel of Chriſt! The greater helps and advantages we have of being good, the greater things may juſtly be expected from us; for to *whomſoever much is given, of him much ſhall be required.*

Chriſtianity is the *fulfilling of the righteouſneſs of the law*, by *walking not after the fleſh, but after the Spirit*, by *mortifying the deeds of the fleſh*, and by *bringing forth the fruits of the Spirit*, which are *love, joy, peace, long-ſuffering, gentleneſs, goodneſs, fidelity, meekneſs and temperance. The righteouſneſs of faith* doth not conſiſt in a barren and ineffectual belief of the goſpel, in a mere embracing of the promiſes of it, and relying upon Chriſt for ſalvation; in a *faith without works*, which is *dead*; but in a *faith which worketh by love*, in becoming *new creatures*, and in *keeping the commandments of God. The righteouſneſs*

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of faith ſpeaking on this wiſe. This is his commandment, that we ſhould believe on the name of his Son Jeſus Chriſt, and love one another, as he gave us commandment, 1 John iii. 23. and, *this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God, love his brother alſo,* 1 John iv. 21. *That we approve the things that are excellent, being filled with the fruits of righteouſneſs, which are by Jeſus Chriſt, to the glory and praiſe of God,* Phil. i. 10. 11. *Whatſoever things are true, whatſoever things are honeſt, whatſoever things are juſt, whatſoever things are pure, whatſoever things are lovely, whatſoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, if there be any praiſe, mind theſe things,* Chap. iv. 8.

And then conſidering what abundant proviſion the goſpel hath made for our attainment of everlaſting ſalvation, we are altogether without excuſe, if we periſh. Since God *hath raiſed up ſo mighty a ſalvation for us, how ſhall we eſcape?* If we *dy in our ſins,* it is not becauſe God would not forgive them, but becauſe we would not repent and be ſaved; the fault is all our own, and we owe it wholly to ourſelves, if we be loſt and undone for ever. If, when life and death, heaven and hell, are ſo plainly ſet before us, eternal miſery and perdition fall to our lot and portion, it is not becauſe we were not warned of our danger, or becauſe happineſs and *the things of our peace were hid from our eyes,* but becauſe we have made death and deſtruction our obſtinate and final choice.

But, beloved, I hope better things of you, and things which accompany ſalvation, tho' I thus ſpeak. Only let your converſation be as becometh the goſpel of Chriſt; and if we be careful to perform the conditions which the goſpel requires on our part, we ſhall not fail to be made *partakers of that eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, hath promiſed to us, for his mercy's ſake in Jeſus Chriſt.*

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SERMON CVI.

Of the nature of regeneration, and its neceſſity, in order to juſtification and ſalvation.

GALAT. vi. 15.

For in Chriſt Jeſus, neither circumciſion availeth any thing, nor uncircumciſion; but a new creature.

The firſt ſermon on this text.

THere are two epiſtles of St. Paul, namely, that to the Romans, and this to the Galatians, which are principally and particularly deſigned to confute a falſe perſuaſion, which had prevailed amongſt many Chriſtians, eſpecially thoſe who were converted from Judaiſm; that it was not enough for men to embrace and confeſs the Chriſtian religion, unleſs they kept the law of Moſes, or at leaſt ſubmitted to that great precept of circumciſion; the neglect whereof, among all the affirmative precepts of the law, was only threatened with exciſion, or being cut off from among the people. And of the prevalency of this error, and the great diſturbance which it made in the Chriſtian church, we have a particular account, Acts xv. where a general council of the Apoſtles is called, and a letter written in their names to all the Chriſtian churches, to rectify their apprehenſions in this matter, ver. 24. of that chap. *For as much as we have heard, that certain which went out from us, have troubled you with words, ſubverting your ſouls, ſaying, ye muſt be circumciſed, and keep the law, to whom we gave no ſuch commandment,* &c.

And upon this occaſion likewiſe it was, that St. Paul wrote this epiſtle to the Galatians, as likewiſe that

that to the Romans; in the former of which, after he had at large confuted this error, (which he calls *the preaching of another goſpel, than what the Apoſtles had preached, and the Chriſtians firſt received*) in the beginning of the 5th chapter he exhorts them to aſſert the liberty, which Chriſt had purchaſed for them, from the obligation of the law of Moſes, ver. 1, 2. *Stand faſt therefore in the liberty wherewith Chriſt hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul ſay unto you, that if ye be circumciſed, Chriſt ſhall profit you nothing*; not that hereby he condemneth circumciſion, as a thing evil in itſelf; for God never inſtituted nor commanded any thing that was ſo; but he oppoſeth the opinion of the neceſſity of it to our juſtification and ſalvation, when the goſpel had ſo plainly taken away the obligation and uſe of it; and conſequently to affirm ſtill the neceſſity of it, was really to renounce Chriſtianity. For if Judaiſm was ſtill the way to ſalvation, Chriſtianity was to no purpoſe; and if Chriſtianity be now the way, then the obligation to the Jewiſh religion was ceaſed. To avoid the force of this reaſoning, it was not enough for the falſe Apoſtles to ſay (as it ſeems they did) that Chriſtians were not obliged univerſally to the whole law of Moſes, but principally to the law of circumciſion; becauſe circumciſion being the ſign and badge of that covenant, whoever took that upon him, did thereby own his obligation to the whole law, ver. 3. 4. *For I teſtify again to every man that is circumciſed, that he is a debtor to do the whole law; Chriſt is become of no effect to you, whoſoever of you are juſtified by the law, ye are fallen from grace*; that is, whoever of you expect and profeſs to be juſtified by the law of Moſes, ye take away the neceſſity and uſe of the Chriſtian religion; and *are fallen from grace*; that is, do in effect renounce the goſpel; for *we through the ſpirit wait for the hope of righteouſneſs by faith*, ver. 5. *we by the Spirit*, in oppoſition to circumciſion, which was in the fleſh, do expect to be juſtified by the belief of the goſpel. *For in Jeſus Chriſt neither circumciſion availeth any thing,*

thing, nor uncircumciſion, ver. 6. that is, now under the diſpenſation of the goſpel by Chriſt Jeſus, it ſignifies nothing to a man's juſtification or ſalvation, whether he be circumciſed, or not circumciſed, whether he be a Jew or a Gentile. All that the goſpel requires as neceſſary to theſe purpoſes, is, that we perform the conditions of the goſpel, that ſo we may be capable of being made partakers of the bleſſings of it.

Now as the great bleſſing and benefit of the goſpel is variouſly expreſt, as by *the forgiveneſs of our ſins,* by *our acceptance with God,* or (which comprehends both) by *our juſtification,* ſometimes by *adoption,* and *our being made the ſons and children of God,* ſometimes by *redemption,* and (which is the conſummation of all) by *ſalvation* and *eternal life*; I ſay, as the bleſſing and benefit of the goſpel is in ſcripture expreſt to us by theſe ſeveral terms, which do in effect all ſignify the ſame thing; ſo our duty, and the condition the goſpel requires on our part, is likewiſe as variouſly expreſt; ſometimes, and that very frequently, by the word *faith,* as being the great ſource and principle of all religious acts and performances; but then this faith muſt not be a bare aſſent and perſuaſion of the truth of the goſpel, but ſuch an effectual belief, as expreſſeth itſelf in ſuitable acts of obedience and holineſs, ſuch as the Apoſtle here calls πίστις δι' ἀγάπης ἐνεργουμένη, *a faith which worketh by love,* a faith that is inſpired and acted, or rather conſummate and made perfect by charity, (for ſo the word doth often ſignify,) and then this phraſe will be juſt of the ſame importance with that of St. James, chap. ii. 22. *by works is faith made perfect.* Sometimes, and that alſo very frequently, the condition of the goſpel is expreſt by words which import and ſignify the change of our ſtate, as by *repentance, converſion, regeneration, renovation, ſanctification, the new creature,* and *the new man*; which expreſſions are all ſo well known, that I need not refer to particular texts; ſometimes the condition of the goſpel is expreſt by the viſible and ſenſible effects of this inward change in our outward life and actions; as

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namely, by obedience and keeping the commandments of God. So Heb. v. 9. Chriſt is ſaid to be *the author of eternal ſalvation to them that obey him*; where obedience is plainly put for the whole condition of the goſpel, the performance whereof entitles us to eternal life and happineſs.

Now that by theſe various expreſſions, one and the ſame thing is certainly intended and meant, viz. the condition of the goſpel; that which is required on our part, in order to our full and perfect juſtification and acceptance with God, is evident beyond all denial; by comparing the three different ways whereby St. Paul doth expreſs the ſame propoſition for ſenſe and ſubſtance; in which he tells us, what it is that will avail to our juſtification under the Goſpel, that is, according to the terms of the Chriſtian religion; that it is neither here nor there, that it ſignifies nothing whether a man be circumciſed or not, but that we be ſo qualified as the goſpel requires, that the conditions upon which the bleſſings of the goſpel are promiſed be found in us. And there are three texts wherein the ſame thing is plainly intended in three very different expreſſions, Gal. v. 6. *In Jeſus Chriſt neither circumciſion availeth any thing, nor uncircumciſion: but faith, which is conſummate,* or *made perfect by charity.* Gal. vi. 15. *For in Chriſt Jeſus neither circumciſion availeth any thing, nor uncircumciſion; but a new creature.* 1 Cor. vii. 19. *Circumciſion is nothing, and uncircumciſion is nothing; but the keeping of the commandments of God.* It is evident, that in theſe three texts the Apoſtle deſigns to ſay the ſame thing, and conſequently that *faith which is made perfect by charity,* and *the new creature,* and *keeping of the commandments of God,* are the ſame in ſenſe and ſubſtance, *viz.* the condition of our juſtification and acceptance with God under the covenant of the goſpel, or in the Chriſtian religion.

I ſhall at preſent, by God's aſſiſtance, handle the ſecond of theſe texts. *In Chriſt Jeſus neither circumciſion availeth any thing, nor uncircumciſion; but a new creature.* And here the condition of the go-

ſpel is expreſt to us, by the change of our ſtate, which in ſcripture is called our *regeneration*, or becoming *new creatures*, and *new men*. Circumciſion was but an outward ſign and mark upon the body, and the fleſh, though it did indeed prefigure and typify the inward circumciſion of the heart, the giving of men new hearts, and new ſpirits, under the more perfect diſpenſation of the goſpel: but now in Chriſt Jeſus, that is, in the Chriſtian religion, the preſence or the want of this outward mark will avail nothing to our juſtification; but that which was ſignified by it, the renovation of our hearts and ſpirits, our becoming new creatures, is now the condition of our juſtification and acceptance with God.

The falſe Apoſtles indeed did lay great ſtreſs upon the buſineſs of circumciſion, not ſo much out of zeal to the law of Moſes, as to avoid perſecution, ver. 12. *They conſtrain you to be circumciſed, only leſt they ſhould ſuffer perſecution for the croſs of Chriſt.* For at that time, though the Chriſtians were perſecuted, yet the Jews by the Roman edicts had the free exerciſe of their religion, and therefore they gloried in this external mark of circumciſion, becauſe it exempted them from ſuffering; but St. Paul gloried in his ſufferings for Chriſt, and the marks of that upon his body, ver. 14. *God forbid that I ſhould glory ſave in the croſs of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt*; and ver. 17. *I bear in my body marks of the Lord Jeſus.* He tells them, what neceſſities ſoever they might pretend of circumciſion, either for their juſtification, or ſalvation, the true ground of all was to ſave themſelves from temporal ſufferings; and that in the chriſtian religion it ſignifieth nothing to recommend them to the favour of God, whether they were circumciſed or not; nothing would be available to this purpoſe, but the renovation and change of their hearts and lives. *For in Chriſt Jeſus neither circumciſion availeth any thing, nor uncircumciſion; but a new creature*, καινὴ κτίσις, *a new creation*, to intimate the greatneſs of the change, which Chriſtianity, throughly entertained, made in men.

Having thus cleared the occaſion and meaning of theſe

these words, I come now to consider the particulars contained in them namely, these two things:

First, That the gospel hath taken away the obligation of the law of Moses. *In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision.*

Secondly, That according to the terms of the Christian religion, nothing will avail to our justification and acceptance with God, but the real renovation of our hearts and lives; *neither circumcision, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.*

1. That the gospel hath taken away the obligation of the law of Moses. *In Christ Jesus*, that is, now under the dispensation of the gospel, *neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision.* There was never any general obligation upon mankind to this rite of circumcision, but only upon the seed of Abraham; but yet upon the preaching of the gospel, many of the Jewish Christians would have brought the Gentiles under this yoke; pretending that Christianity was but a superstructure upon the law of Moses, which, together with the gospel, was to be the religion of the whole world; and there was some colour for this, because our Saviour himself submitted to this rite, and was circumcised, which the Apostle takes notice of in the iv. chap. of this epistle, ver. 4. *When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law*, that is, *circumcised.* And it is true indeed, that our blessed Saviour was circumcised, but not to signify to us the perpetuity of circumcision, and the continuance of it under the Christian religion, but for a quite different end; as a testimony of his obedience to that law, which though afterwards it was to expire, yet was to be obeyed whilst it was in force, by all that were born under it; he was *made under the law*, and it became him, who came to teach mankind obedience to the laws of God, *to fulfil all righteousness* himself. And therefore the Apostle in this epistle, where he takes notice of this, that Christ was *made under the law*, gives this reason of it, that he might be the fitter to free those who were under it, from the servitude of it; he was *made under the*

law, that he might redeem them that were under the law; and that thoſe who were in the condition of ſervants before, might be ſet at liberty and *receive the adoption of ſons.*

But how did his being *made under the law* qualify him *to redeem thoſe who were under the law?* Thus, by ſubmitting to it himſelf, he ſhewed that he owned the authority of it, and that he had no malice or enmity againſt it; as he himſelf expreſſes it, that *he came not to deſtroy the law, but to fulfil it.* And being fulfilled, and having ſerved the time and end for which God intended it, it expired of itſelf; like a law which is not made for perpetuity, but limited to a certain period. And our bleſſed Saviour, who came with greater authority than Moſes, and gave greater teſtimony of his divine authority, had ſufficient power to declare the expiration of it; and by commiſſioning his diſciples before and after his death to preach the goſpel to the whole world, he put end to that particular law and diſpenſation, which only concerned the Jewiſh nation, by giving a general law to all mankind.

So that from the death of our Saviour, and his aſcenſion into heaven, upon which followed the general publication of the goſpel, the law of Moſes ceaſed, and according to our Saviour's expreſs appointment, proſelytes were to be admitted into the Chriſtian church only by baptiſm, and not by circumciſion. And if circumciſion, which was the ſign of that covenant was laid aſide, then the whole obligation of that law and covenant which God had made with the Jews, was alſo ceaſed. It was once indeed the mark of God's choſen and peculiar people; but now that God hath revealed himſelf to the whole world by his Son, and offers ſalvation to all mankind, Gentiles as well as Jews, the *wall of ſeparation is broken down*, and circumciſion, which was the mark of diſtinction between Jews and Gentiles, is taken away; and therefore he is ſaid *to have made peace by his croſs, and to have blotted out and taken away the hand-writing of ordinances, nailing it to his croſs*; that is, from the time of his death

death, to have taken away the obligation of the law of Moſes, though it was a good while after, before the Jews were wholly weaned from the veneration and uſe of it.

Nay, it was ſome time before the Apoſtles were clearly convinced, that the goſpel was to be preached to the Gentiles; this being one of thoſe truths which our Saviour promiſed after his departure, his Spirit ſhould lead them into the perfect knowledge of; and then they were fully inſtructed, that the law of Moſes was expired, and that it was no longer neceſſary to the ſalvation of men, that they ſhould be circumciſed, and keep that law. And though it was once enjoined by God himſelf to the Jews, and their obedience to it was neceſſary to their acceptance with God; yet now by Chriſt Jeſus, God hath offered ſalvation to men upon other terms; and whether they were circumciſed or not, was of no moment to their juſtification or ſalvation one way or other; but provided they performed the condition of this new covenant of the goſpel, they were all alike capable of the divine favour and acceptance.

But I proceed to that, which I mainly intended to proſecute from theſe words; and that is the

Second particular in the text, namely, that according to the terms of the goſpel, and the chriſtian religion, nothing will avail to our juſtification and acceptance with God, but the real renovation of our hearts and lives; *neither circumciſion, nor uncircumciſion; but a new creature.* For the full explication of this, I ſhall do theſe three things:

Firſt, Shew what is implied in this phraſe of a *new creature.*

Secondly, That this is the great condition of our juſtification and acceptance with God, and that it is the ſame in ſubſtance with *faith perfected by charity*, and with *keeping the commandments of God.*

Thirdly, That it is very reaſonable it ſhould be ſo.

1. What is implied in this phraſe of a *new creature.* It is plain at firſt ſight, that it is a metaphorical expreſſion of that great and thorough change which is made in men by the goſpel, or the Chriſti-

an religion. The ſcripture ſets forth to us this change by great variety of expreſſions, by *converſion*, and *turning from our iniquities unto God*; by *repentance*, (which ſignifies a change of our mind and reſolution, and is in Scripture called *repentance from dead works, and repentance unto life*;) by *regeneration*, or *being born again*; by *reſurrection from the dead*, and *riſing to newneſs of life*; by *ſanctification*, and being *waſhed* and *cleanſed* from all filthineſs and impurity, (which three laſt metaphors are implied in baptiſm, which is called regeneration, Tit. iii. 5. *According to his mercy he ſaved us by the waſhing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghoſt*, and our being *born again of water and the Holy Ghoſt*, John iii. 3. *Except a man be born again*, &c. and ver. 5. *Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God*; and *the purifying of our conſciences*, Heb. x. 22. *Having our hearts ſprinkled from an evil conſcience, and our bodies waſhed with pure water*; and *the anſwer of a good conſcience towards God*, 1 Pet. iii. 21. *Baptiſm doth now ſave us; not the putting away of the filth of the fleſh, but the anſwer of a good conſcience towards God*; and finally our being *baptiſed into the death and reſurrection of Chriſt*, Rom. vi. 3, 4. *Know ye not that ſo many of us as were baptized into Jeſus Chriſt, were baptized into his death? therefore we are buried with with him by baptiſm into death, that like as Chriſt was raiſed up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even ſo we alſo ſhould walk in newneſs of life.)* And laſtly, this change is ſet forth to us by renovation, and our being made new creatures, and new men, 2 Cor. v. 17. *Therefore if any man be in Chriſt*, that is, profeſſeth himſelf a Chriſtian, *he is a new creature*; *old things are paſt away, behold all things are become new.* And ſo likewiſe, Epheſ. iv. 22, 23, 24. this great change is expreſt by *putting off concerning the former converſation, the old man which is corrupt according to the luſts of deceit, and being renewed in the ſpirit of our minds, and putting on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteouſneſs and true holineſs.* The expreſſion

preſſion is very emphatical, *renewed in the ſpirit of our minds*, that is, in our very minds and ſpirits, to ſignify to us, that it is a moſt inward and through change, reaching to the very center of our ſouls and ſpirits. And Coloſ. iii. 9, 10, 11. it is repreſented much after the ſame manner, *Seeing ye have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him. Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumciſion nor uncircumciſion, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but Chriſt is all and in all.* Which is the ſame with what the Apoſtle ſays here in the text, that *in Chriſt Jeſus neither circumciſion availeth any thing, nor uncircumciſion; but a new creature*; that is, theſe external marks and differences ſignify nothing: But this inward change, *the new creature, Chriſt formed in us*, this in the Chriſtian religion is *all in all.*

But that we may the more clearly underſtand the juſt importance of this metaphor of *a new creature*, or a *new creation*, I ſhall,

Firſt, Conſider what it doth certainly ſignify, by comparing this metaphorical phraſe with other plain texts of ſcripture.

And *ſecondly*, That it doth not import what ſome would extend it to, ſo as to found doctrines of great conſequence upon the ſingle ſtrength of this and the like metaphors in ſcripture, without any manner of countenance from plain texts:

Firſt, I ſhall conſider what this metaphor doth certainly import, ſo as to be undeniably evident from other more clear and full texts of ſcripture, namely theſe two things:

1. The greatneſs of this change.

2. That it is effected and wrought by a divine power.

1. The greatneſs of this change; it is called καινὴ κτίσις, *a new creation*; as if the Chriſtian doctrine, firmly entertained and believed, did as it were mould and faſhion men over again, transforming them into a quite other ſort of perſons, than what they were before, and made ſuch a change in them, as the creating

ating power of God did, in bringing this beautiful and orderly frame of things out of their dark and rude *Chaos.* Thus the Apoſtle repreſents it, 2 Cor. iv. 6. *God who commanded the light to ſhine out of darkneſs,* (alluding to the firſt creation) *hath ſhined into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jeſus Chriſt.* We are tranſlated from one extreme to another. Acts xxvi. 18. when our Lord ſends Paul to preach the goſpel to the Gentiles, he tells him what a change it would make in them, by *opening their eyes, and turning them from darkneſs to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.* And St. Peter expreſſes the change which Chriſtianity makes in men, by their being *called out of darkneſs into a marvellous light,* 1 Pet. ii. 9. And ſo St. Paul, Eph. v. 8. *Ye were ſometimes darkneſs, but now are ye light in the Lord.*

And indeed wherever the doctrine of Chriſt hath its full effect, and perfect work, it makes a mighty change both in their inward principles, and outward practice; it darts a new light into their minds, ſo that they ſee things otherwiſe than they did before, and form a different judgment of things from what they did before; it endues them with a new principle, and new reſolutions, gives them another ſpirit and another temper, a quite different ſenſe and guſt of things from what they formerly had. And this inward change of their minds neceſſarily produceth a proportionable change in their lives and converſations, ſo that the man ſteers quite another courſe, acts after another rate, and drives on quite other deſigns from what he did before.

And this is remarkably ſeen in thoſe who are reclaimed from impiety and profaneneſs to religion, and from a vicious to a virtuous courſe of life. The change is great and real in all; but not ſo ſenſible and viſible in ſome, as others; in thoſe who are made good by the inſenſible ſteps of a pious and virtuous education; as in thoſe who are tranſlated out of a quite contrary ſtate, and *turned from the power of Satan unto God,* and *tranſlated out of the kingdom of darkneſs into the kingdom of Chriſt*; which was

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the caſe of the heathen world, in their firſt converſion to Chriſtianity.

Secondly, This change is effected and wrought by a divine power, of the ſame kind with that, which created the world, and raiſed up Chriſt Jeſus from the dead; two great and glorious inſtances of the divine power; and to theſe the ſcripture frequently alludes, when it ſpeaks of this new creation. *God, who commanded the light to ſhine out of darkneſs, hath ſhined into our hearts. Like as Chriſt was raiſed from the dead by the glory of the Father, ſo we alſo are raiſed to newneſs of life*, ſaith St. Paul, Rom. vi. 4. And to the ſame purpoſe the ſame Apoſtle ſpeaks, Epheſ. i. 19, 20. And that ye may know *what is the exceeding greatneſs of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the operation of his mighty power; which he wrought in Chriſt, when he raiſed him from the dead.* So that our renovation, and being made new creatures, is an inſtance of the ſame glorious power which exerted itſelf in the firſt creation of things, and in the reſurrection of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt from the dead; but not altogether after the ſame manner, as I ſhall ſhew under the next head.

I ſhould now, in the ſecond place, proceed to ſhow, that this metaphor of a new creation doth not import what ſome men would extend it to, ſo as to found doctrines of great conſequence upon the ſingle ſtrength of this and other like metaphors of ſcripture, without any manner of countenance and confirmation from plain texts. But this I reſerve to another diſcourſe.

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SERMON CVII.

Of the nature of regeneration, and its neceſſity, in order to juſtification and ſalvation.

GALAT. vi. 15.

For in Chriſt Jeſus neither circumciſion availeth any thing, nor uncircumciſion; but a new creature.

The ſecond ſermon on this text.

IN theſe words are contained theſe two things; *Firſt*, That the goſpel hath taken away the obligation of the law, having taken away the ſign of that covenant, which was circumciſion.

Secondly, That according to the terms of the goſpel, and the Chriſtian religion, nothing will avail to our juſtification and acceptance with God, but the real renovation of our hearts and lives. For the full explication of this, I propounded to do theſe three things:

I. To ſhew what is implied in this phraſe of *a new creature*.

II. That this is the great condition of our juſtification and acceptance with God, and that it is the ſame in ſenſe and ſubſtance with thoſe other expreſſions, in the two parallel texts, of *faith perfected by charity*, and *keeping the commandments of God*.

III. That it is very reaſonable that this ſhould be the condition of our juſtification, and acceptance to the favour of God.

I began with the *firſt* of theſe, *viz.* To ſhew what is implied in this phraſe of *a new creature*; as to which I ſhewed,

Firſt, What this metaphor doth certainly import, ſo as to be undeniably evident from other more clear and

and full texts of scripture; namely, the greatness of this change; and that it is effected by a divine power. I now proceed,

Secondly, To shew that it doth not import what some would extend it to, and that so as to found doctrines of great consequence upon the mere and single strength of this and other like metaphors of scripture, without any manner of countenance and confirmation from plain texts; such doctrines as these three:

1. That as the creation was by an irresistible act of the divine power, so is this new creation, or conversion of a sinner.

2. That as creatures were merely passive in their being made, and contributed nothing at all to it, no more do we to our conversion and regeneration.

3. That as the creation of the several ranks and kinds of creatures was in an instant, and effected by the powerful word of God, only saying, let such and such things be, and immediately they were; so this new creation, or the work of regeneration, is in an instant, and admits of no degrees.

Concerning these three doctrines, of great moment and consequence in divinity, I shall shew, with all the clearness and brevity I can, that they are built solely upon metaphors of scripture, tortured and strained too far, without any real ground and foundation from scripture or reason; nay, contrary to the tenor of the one and the dictates of the other; nay, indeed contrary to the general experience of the operation of God's grace upon the minds of men in their conversion.

First, It is pretended, that as the creation was by an irresistible act of the divine power, so is the new creation, or the conversion of a sinner; and this is solely argued from the metaphorical expressions of scripture concerning conversion; such as being *called out of darkness into light*, alluding to that powerful word of God, which in the first creation *commanded the light to shine out of darkness*, being quickened, and raised to a new life; and from this metaphor here in the text, of a new creation.

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But ſurely it is a dangerous thing in divinity to build doctrines upon metaphors, eſpecially if we ſtrain them to all the ſimilitudes which a quick and lively imagination can find out; whereas ſome one obvious thing is commonly intended in the metaphor, and the meaning is abſolved and acquitted in that, and it is folly to purſue it in all thoſe ſimilitudes which a good fancy may ſuggeſt. When our Saviour ſays, that he will *come as a thief in the night*, it is plain what he means; that the day of judgment will ſurprize the careleſs world, when they leaſt look for it, that *he will come at an hour when they are not aware*; and though he reſemble his coming to that of *a thief in the night*, yet here is nothing of robbery in the caſe. So here, when the change which Chriſtianity makes in men is called a new creation, this only imports the greatneſs of the change, which by the power of God's grace is made upon the hearts and lives of men; and the metaphor is ſufficiently abſolved in this plain ſenſe and meaning of it, agreeable to the literal expreſſions of ſcripture concerning this thing; and there is no need that this change ſhould in all other reſpects anſwer the work of creation; and conſequently there is no neceſſity that it ſhould be effected in an irreſiſtible manner, or that we ſhould be altogether paſſive in this change, and that we ſhould noways concur to it by any act of our own, or that this work ſhould be done in an inſtant, and admit of no ſteps and degrees.

It is not neceſſary that this change ſhould be effected in an irreſiſtible manner. God may do ſo, when he pleaſeth, without any injury to his creatures; for it is certainly no wrong to any man to be made good and happy againſt his will; and I do not deny, but that God ſometimes does ſo. The call of the diſciples to follow Chriſt ſeems to have been a very ſudden and forcible impreſſion upon their minds, without any appearing reaſon for it; for it is not reaſonable for any man to leave his calling, and follow every one that bids him do ſo. The converſion of Saul from a perſecutor of Chriſtianity, to a zealous preacher of it, was certainly effected, if not in

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an irreſiſtible, yet in a very forcible and violent manner. The converſion of three thouſand at one ſermon, when the Holy Ghoſt deſcended in a viſible manner upon the Apoſtles, was certainly the effect of a mighty and over-powering degree of God's grace. And the like may be ſaid of the ſudden converſion of ſo many perſons from Heatheniſm, and great wickedneſs and impiety of life, to the ſincere profeſſion of Chriſtianity, by the preaching of the Apoſtles afterwards.

But that this is not of abſolute neceſſity, nor the ordinary method of God's grace, to work upon the minds of men in ſo over-powering, much leſs in an irreſiſtible manner, is as plain as any thing of that nature can be, both from experience, and the reaſon of the thing, and the conſtant tenor of the ſcripture. We find that many (perhaps the greateſt part) of thoſe that are good are made ſo by the inſenſible ſteps and degrees of a religious education, and having been never vicious, can give no great account of any ſenſible change, only that when they came to years of underſtanding, they conſidered things more, and the principles that were inſtilled into them in their younger years did put forth themſelves more vigorouſly at that time; as ſeeds ſprout out of the ground, after they have a good while been buried and lain hid in the earth.

And it is contrary to reaſon, to make an irreſiſtible act of divine power neceſſary to our repentance and converſion; becauſe this neceſſarily involves in it two things which ſeem very unreaſonable:

Firſt, That no man repents upon conſideration and choice, but upon mere force and violent neceſſity, which quite takes away the virtue of repentance, whatever virtue there may be in the conſequent acts of a regenerate ſtate.

Secondly, It implies that the converſion and repentance of thoſe upon whom God doth not work irreſiſtibly is impoſſible, which is the utmoſt can be ſaid to excuſe the impenitency of men, by taking it off from their own choice, and laying it upon the im-

poſſibility of the thing, and an utter diſability in them to chooſe and do otherwiſe.

And it is likewiſe contrary to the conſtant tenor of the Bible, which ſuppoſeth that men do very frequently reſiſt the grace and Holy Spirit of God. It is ſaid of the Phariſees by our Saviour, Luke vii. 30. that *they rejected the counſel of God againſt themſelves*; that is, the merciful deſign of God for their ſalvation: And of the Jews, Acts vii. 51. that *they always reſiſted the Holy Ghoſt*. So that ſome operations of God's grace and Holy Spirit are reſiſtible, and ſuch, as if men did not reſiſt them, would be effectual to bring them to faith and repentance; elſe why are the Phariſees ſaid to *reject the counſel of God againſt themſelves*, that is, to their own ruin? implying, that if they had not rejected it, they might have been ſaved; and if they had, it had been without irreſiſtible grace; for that which was offered to them, was actually reſiſted by them. Other texts plainly ſhew, that the reaſon of mens impenitency and unbelief is not any thing wanting on God's part, but on theirs; as thoſe known texts, wherein our Saviour laments the caſe of Jeruſalem, becauſe they obſtinately brought deſtruction upon themſelves, Luke xix. 42. *If thou hadſt known in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace*; intimating that they might have known them, ſo as to have prevented that deſolation which was coming upon them, and was a forerunner of their eternal ruin; *but now they are hid from thine eyes*; intimating that then God gave them up to their own blindneſs and obſtinacy; but the time was when they might have *known the things of their peace*; which cannot be upon the ſuppoſition of the neceſſity of an irreſiſtible act of God's grace to their converſion and repentance; becauſe then without that they could not have repented, and if that had been afforded to them, they had infallibly repented. So likewiſe in that other text, Matth. xxiii. 37. *O Jeruſalem, Jeruſalem, how often would I have gathered thee, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!* And in John v. 40. *Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life.*

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He *would have gathered them,* and they *would not*; he would have given them *life*, but they *would not come to him.* Are theſe ſerious and compaſſionate expoſtulations and declarations of our Saviour's gracious intention towards them, any ways conſiſtent with an impoſſibility of their repentance? which yet muſt be ſaid, if irreſiſtible grace be neceſſary thereto; for then repentance is impoſſible without it, and that it was not afforded to them is plain, becauſe they did not repent. The ſame may be ſaid of that ſolemn declaration of God, Ezek. xxxiii. 11. *As I live, ſaith the Lord God, I have no pleaſure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.* Can it be ſaid that God hath *no pleaſure in the death of ſinners,* and yet be true, that he denies to the greateſt part of them that grace which is neceſſary to their repentance? Upon this ſuppoſition how can it be true, that *if the mighty works that were done in Chorazin and Bethſaida, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented,* Mat. xi. 21. ſince irreſiſtible grace did not accompany thoſe miracles? for if it had, Chorazin and Bethſaida had repented, and without it Tyre and Sidon could not repent.

The ſame difficulty is in thoſe texts, wherein God is repreſented as expecting the repentance and converſion of ſinners; and our Saviour *wondering at their unbelief and hardneſs of heart,* and *upbraiding them with it,* Iſa. v. 4. *What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore when I looked that it ſhould bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?* Mark vi. 6. it is ſaid *our Saviour marvelled at the unbelief* of the Jews. And chap. xvi. 14. that he *upbraided his diſciples with their unbelief and hardneſs of heart.* But why ſhould the repentance of ſinners be expected, or their unbelief marvelled at, or indeed be upbraided to them, by him who knew it impoſſible to them, without an irreſiſtible power and grace, which he knew likewiſe was not afforded to them? neither God nor man have reaſon to wonder that any man

does not do that, which at the ſame time they certainly know he cannot do.

The bottom of all that is ſaid to avoid this preſſing difficulty, is this, "that this impotence and diſ-"ability of ſinners is their ſin, and therefore can-"not be pleaded in their excuſe, for their impeni-"tency; but God may ſtill juſtly require that of "them, which they had once a natural power to do, "but wilfully forfeited and loſt it; they had this "power in Adam, and forfeited it by his diſobedi-"ence." To ſhew how ſlight this evaſion is, I need not run into that argument, how far we are guilty of the ſin of our firſt parents. That by that firſt tranſgreſſion and diſobedience all mankind ſuffers, and our natures are extremely corrupted and depraved, cannot be denied; but the corruption of our natures is a thing very different from perſonal guilt, ſtrictly and properly ſo called. I will take the buſineſs much ſhorter, and granting that mankind had in Adam a natural power to have continued obedient to the laws of God, yet ſince *by one man ſin entered into the world,* and *all are now ſinners,* here is an obligation to repentance, as well as to obedience, and men ſhall be condemned for their impenitency. I ask now, whether in Adam we had a power to repent? It is certain Adam had not this power, and therefore I cannot ſee how we could loſe it, and forfeit it in him. Adam indeed had a natural power not to have ſinned, and ſo not to have needed repentance; but no power to repent in the ſtate of innocency, becauſe in that ſtate repentance was impoſſible, becauſe there could be no occaſion for it. He had it not after his fall, becauſe by that he forfeited all his power to that which is ſpiritually good. It is ſaid indeed he had it in innocency, but forfeited it by his fall; ſo that he had it, when there was no occaſion or poſſibility of the exerciſe of it, and loſt it when there was occaſion for it; or if he did not loſe it by his fall, we have it ſtill, and then there is no need of any ſupernatural, much leſs irreſiſtible grace to repentance; ſo that our impotency, as to the particular duty of repentance, cannot be char-

charged upon us, as our fault, not so much as upon the account of original sin.

But the want of this power is the consequent and just punishment of our first transgression. Be it so: But if this impotency still remain in all those to whom God doth not afford his irresistible grace, how comes the grace offered in the gospel to aggravate the impenitency of men, and increase their condemnation? For if it be no remedy against this impotency, how comes it to inflame the guilt of impenitency? Or how is it grace to offer mercy to those upon their repentance, who are out of a possibility of repenting; and yet to punish them more severely for their impenitency after this offer made to them, which they cannot accept without that grace which God is resolved not to afford them? If this be the case, the greatest favour had been to have had no such offer made to them, and it had been happier for mankind, that *the grace of God had not appeared to all men*, but only to those who shall irresistibly be made partakers of the benefit of it.

Secondly, Another doctrine grounded upon this metaphor of a new creation, is, that we are merely passive in the work of conversion and regeneration, and contribute nothing to it; that God does all, and we do nothing at all; and this follows from the former, especially if we allow that metaphor as far as it will carry us. For as the first creation of things was by an irresistible act of divine power, so the things that were made were only passive in their creation; and as they could make no resistance, so neither could they contribute any thing to their being what they are. And this doctrine is not only argued from the metaphor of a new creation, but from several other metaphors used in scripture to describe our natural state; as namely, *darkness*, *blindness*, and our being *dead in trespasses and sins*; from whence it is inferred, that we contribute no more to our renovation, than darkness doth to the introduction of light, than a blind man can do to the recovery of his sight, or a dead man to his own resurrection; but are wholly passive in this work. And to coun-

tenance this notion, they make great advantage of the character which is given in ſcripture of the moſt degenerate heathen, taking it for granted, that their condition is the true ſtandard of a natural and unregenerate ſtate; and to this purpoſe they inſiſt particularly upon that deſcription of the Gentile idolaters, Eph. iv. 18, 19. *Having the underſtanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them, becauſe of the blindneſs of their hearts; who being paſt feeling, have given themſelves over to laſciviouſneſs, to work all uncleanneſs with greedineſs.* Which is indeed a deſcription of men in their natural ſtate, but not of all, but of ſuch as by the worſt ſort of vicious practices of the groſſeſt idolatry, and moſt abominable lewdneſs, were degenerated to the utmoſt, ſo that their condition ſeemed deſperate, without a miraculous and an extraordinary grace of God, which was probably afforded to many of theſe. In like manner they argue the common condition of mankind, from the deſcription which is given of the wickedneſs of men, before God brought the flood upon them. Gen. vi. 5. *God ſaw that the wickedneſs of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.* This they make the character of all men, in their natural ſtate, whereas this is a deſcription of an extraordinary degeneracy of men, ſignifying that the world was then extremely bad, and depraved to the higheſt degree; for God gives this as a reaſon why he was reſolved to drown the world, and *to deſtroy man from the face of the earth,* becauſe *their wickedneſs was grown to ſo great an height.* But if this were a deſcription of the natural ſtate of mankind, this could be no particular reaſon for bringing a flood upon the world at that time, there being the ſame reaſon for it, for fifteen hundred years before, and ever will be the ſame reaſon to the end of the world, that is, that men are naturally corrupted and depraved. Surely they conſider the Scripture very ſuperficially, that interpret it at this rate.

It is too true, that the nature of man is ſadly cor-

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rupted and depraved; but not ſo bad as by vicious practices and habits it may be made. All men are not equally at the ſame diſtance from the grace of God; ſome are *nearer to the kingdom of God* than others, and leſs force and violence will ſerve *to reſcue them from the power of Satan,* and *to tranſplant them into the kingdom of Chriſt.* The prevalency and dominion of ſin makes an unregenerate ſtate, as the prevalency of grace puts a man into a regenerate ſtate. An unregenerate man is not neceſſarily as bad as is poſſible, no more than it is neceſſary to a regenerate ſtate, that a man be perfectly good; ſo that it is a great miſtake to argue the common condition of all mankind, from the deſcriptions that are given in the ſcripture of the worſt of men; and therefore if it were granted that irreſiſtible grace were neceſſary for the converſion of ſuch, it will not follow that the ſame is neceſſary to all.

All unregenerate men are not equally devoid of a ſenſe of God, and ſpiritual things; they have many convictions of what they ought to be and do, and under thoſe convictions are very capable of perſuaſion, which dead men are not. The grace of God is neceſſary to the converſion of a ſinner, but it is not neceſſary that he ſhould be only paſſive in this work. Experience tells us the contrary, that we can do ſomething, that we can co-operate with the grace of God; and the ſcripture tells us the ſame, and makes it an argument and encouragement to us *to work out our own ſalvation,* becauſe *God works in us both to will and to do of his own goodneſs,* Phil. ii. 12, 13. Beſides, that it is the greateſt and juſteſt diſcouragement in the world to all endeavours of repentance and reformation, to tell men that they can do nothing in it. He that is ſure of this, that he can do nothing in this work, is a fool if he make any attempt to become better, becauſe he ſtruggles with an impoſſibility; and if the work will be done at all, it will be done without him, and he neither can, nor ought to have any hand in it. But will any metaphor bear men out againſt ſo palpable an abſurdity as this?

And

And yet after all, there is no force in theſe metaphors, to prove what they aim at by them. For if to be *dead in ſin* ſignifies an utter impotency to goodneſs, then to be *dead to ſin* muſt on the contrary ſignify an impoſſibility of ſinning; for juſt as the unregenerate man is *dead in ſin*, ſo he that is regenerate is ſaid in ſcripture to be *dead to ſin*: But yet the beſt of regenerate men, notwithſtanding they are *dead to ſin*, and *alive to God, do offend in many things*, and too frequently fall into ſin. Why then ſhould the metaphor be ſo ſtrong on the one ſide, that a man who is ſaid to be *dead in ſin*, ſhould not be able ſo much as to co-operate with the grace of God in the work of repentance and converſion?

In ſhort, if this be true, that men in an unregenerate and unconverted ſtate are perfectly dead, and have no more ſenſe of ſpiritual things than a dead man hath of natural objects, then all precepts and exhortations to repentance, and all promiſes and threatenings to argue and perſuade men thereto, are vain, and to no purpoſe; and it would be every whit as proper and reaſonable for us to preach in the church-yard, over the graves of dead men, as in the church to the unregenerate; becauſe they can no more act and move towards their own recovery out of a ſtate of ſin and death, than the dead bodies can riſe out of their graves.

But it is ſaid, that the end of exhortations and promiſes is not to declare to men their power, but their duty. But if they be inſenſible, it is to as little purpoſe to declare to them their duty, as their power. Beſides, it will be an hard thing to convince men that any thing is their duty, which at the ſame time we declare to them to be out of their power.

But this is Pelagianiſm, to ſay that of ourſelves we can repent and turn to God. And who ſays we can of ourſelves do this, beſides the Pelagians? We affirm the neceſſity of God's grace hereto, and withal the neceſſity of our co-operating with the grace of God. We ſay that without the powerful excitation and aid of God's grace, no man can repent and turn to God; but we ſay likewiſe, that God cannot be

be properly ſaid to aid and aſſiſt thoſe, who do nothing themſelves.

But men can do more than they do, and therefore are juſtly condemned, Not in the work of converſion ſure; if they can do nothing at all. But they can do more by way of preparation towards it. Suppoſe they do all they can towards it, will this ſave them, or will God upon this irreſiſtibly work their converſion? No, they ſay, notwithſtanding any preparatory work that we can do, converſion may not follow. How then does this mend the matter?

But ſtill they ſay the fault is in mens want of will, and not of power; *ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life.* But can they will to come? No, that they cannot neither. Why then it is ſtill want of power that hinders them. The offer of life is a very gracious offer to them that are guilty, and liable to death, as we all are; but not if the condition be utterly impoſſible to us, though the impoſſibility ſprings from our own fault, as I will plainly ſhew by a fair inſtance. A Prince offers a pardon to a traitor faſt locked in chains, if he will come to him and ſubmit himſelf: But if he be ſtill detained in chains, and the Prince do not ſome way or other help him to his liberty, it is ſo far from being a favour to offer him a pardon upon theſe terms, that it is a cruel deriſion of his miſery to ſay to him, you will not come to me that you may be pardoned; and this notwithſtanding that his being caſt into chains was the effect of his own crime and fault. The application is obvious. I ſhould now proceed to anſwer an objection or two, and then to give a clear ſtate of this matter, ſo as is moſt agreeable to ſcripture, and the attributes and perfections of God; but this I ſhall reſerve for another diſcourſe.

SER.

SERMON CVIII.

Of the nature of regeneration, and its neceſſity, in order to juſtification and ſalvation.

GALAT. vi. 15.

For in Chriſt Jeſus, neither circumciſion availeth any thing, nor uncircumciſion; but a new creature.

The third ſermon on this text.

THE point which I am upon from theſe words is, that *according to the terms of the goſpel, nothing will avail to our juſtification, but the real renovation of our hearts and lives.*

For the full explication of this, I propounded to ſhew,

Firſt, What is implied in this expreſſion of the *new creature.*

Secondly, That this is the great condition of our juſtification and acceptance with God.

Thirdly, That it is highly reaſonable that this ſhould be the condition of our juſtification.

In ſpeaking to the firſt of theſe, I have ſhewed, *1ſt*, What this metaphor doth certainly import; and, *2dly*, That it doth not import what ſome would extend it to, whereon to found ſuch doctrines as theſe:

Firſt, That as the creation was an irreſiſtible act of the divine power, ſo is this new creation, or the converſion of a ſinner.

Secondly, As creatures are merely paſſive in their being made, and contributed nothing at all to it, no more do we in our converſion and regeneration.

Thirdly, That as the creation of the ſeveral kinds and ranks of creatures was effected in an inſtant, by the

the powerful word of God, ſaying, *let ſuch and ſuch things be*, and immediately they were; ſo this new creation is in an inſtant, and admits of no degrees.

The firſt of theſe I have conſidered, and entered upon the ſecond; namely, that as the creatures were merely paſſive in their being made, and contributed nothing at all thereto, no more do we in our converſion and regeneration.

This I told you does plainly make void all the precepts and exhortations, and all the promiſes and threatenings of ſcripture, to argue and perſuade men to repentance.

That which remains to be done upon this argument, is,

Firſt, To anſwer an objection or two, which are commonly urged by the aſſertors of this doctrine, that we are merely paſſive in the work of converſion.

Secondly, To give a clear ſtate of this matter, ſo as is moſt agreeable to ſcripture, and the attributes and perfections of God. For the

Firſt, The objections are theſe three:

1. That if we be not merely paſſive in the work of regeneration and converſion, we aſcribe the whole glory of this work to ourſelves, and not to God.

Or, 2*dly*, We do however extenuate or leſſen the grace of God, if there be any active concurrence and endeavours of our own towards this change.

3*dly*, They ask St. Paul's queſtion, *who maketh thee to differ?* and think it impoſſible to be anſwered, if the efficacy of God's grace do depend upon our concurrence and compliance with it. Theſe are all the material objections I know; to every one of which I hope to give a very clear and ſufficient anſwer.

1. *Objection.* If we be not merely paſſive in the work of regeneration and converſion, we aſcribe the whole glory of this work to ourſelves, and not to God. But that I certainly know this objection is commonly made, and have ſeen it in very conſiderable authors, I could not believe that men of ſo good ſenſe could make it. For this is to ſay, that

if

if we do any thing in this work, though we acknowledge that what we do in it, we do by the aſſiſtance of God's grace, we aſcribe it wholly to ourſelves, and rob God altogether of the glory of his grace; or in plainer terms, it is to ſay, that though we ſay God does never ſo much, and we but very little in this work, yet if we do not ſay that God does all, and we nothing at all, we take the whole work to ourſelves, and ſay God does nothing at all; which let any one that conſiders what we ſay, judge whether we ſay ſo or no.

The ſcripture, which never robs God of the glory of his grace, does I am ſure aſcribe our converſion and repentance, our regeneration and ſanctification, to ſeveral cauſes; to the Holy Spirit of God, to his miniſters, to his word, and to ourſelves. To the Holy Spirit of God, as the principal author, and efficient. Hence we are ſaid *to be born of the Spirit, to be ſanctified by the renewing of the Holy Ghoſt.* To the miniſters of God, as the inſtruments of our converſion. Hence they are ſaid *to turn men to righteouſneſs; to convert a ſinner from the evil of his ways; to ſave ſouls from death; to ſave themſelves, and them that hear them; to be our ſpiritual fathers, and to beget us in Chriſt.* To the word of God, as the ſubordinate means and inſtruments of our converſion. Hence we are ſaid *to be begotten by the word of truth, to be ſanctified by the truth.* And laſtly, to ourſelves, as concurring ſome way or other to this work. Hence we are ſaid *to believe and repent, to turn from our evil ways,* and to *turn to the Lord, to cleanſe and purify ourſelves.* Hence likewiſe are thoſe frequent commands in ſcripture, *to amend our ways and doings, to waſh our hearts from wickedneſs, to repent and turn ourſelves, and to make ourſelves new hearts and new ſpirits.* So that all theſe cauſes, the Spirit of God, his miniſters, his word, and we ourſelves, do all ſome way or other concur and contribute to this effect. God indeed is the principal, and hath ſo great an hand in this work, from beginning to end, that all the reſt are nothing in compariſon, and we do well to aſcribe to him the whole glory of it, *that*

no

no fleſh may glory in his ſight: But nevertheleſs in ſtrictneſs of ſpeech, ſufficiently warranted by ſcripture, the miniſters of God, and the word of God, and we ourſelves, do all co-operate ſome way or other to our converſion, and regeneration; and by aſcribing to any of theſe ſuch parts as they truly have in this work, God is not robbed of any part of the glory of his grace, much leſs the whole. Much leſs is it the aſcribing of it all to ourſelves, whom we affirm to have the leaſt part in it, nor worthy to be mentioned, in compariſon of the riches of God's grace towards us. And yet unleſs we do ſomething, what can be the meaning of *making ourſelves new hearts and new ſpirits?* Is it only that we ſhould be paſſive to the irreſiſtible operations of God's grace? that is, that we ſhould not hinder, what we can neither hinder nor promote; that we ſhould ſo demean ourſelves, as of neceſſity we muſt whether we will or no. So then *to make ourſelves new hearts and new ſpirits,* is to do nothing at all towards the hindrance or furtherance of this work; and if this be the meaning of it, it is a precept and exhortation juſt as fit for ſtones, as for men; that is, very improper for either.

2. *Objection.* But however, we do extenuate and leſſen the grace of God, if there be any active concurrence and endeavours on our part towards this change. For anſwer to this, three things deſerve to be conſidered:

Firſt, It is very well worthy our conſideration, that they who make this objection, have the confidence to pretend that they do not diminiſh the grace of God, by confining it to a very ſmall part of mankind in compariſon; nay, they will needs face us down, that by this very thing they do very much exalt and magnify it, and that the grace of God is ſo much the greater, by how much the fewer they are that are partakers of it. But I hope they only mean that the grace is greater to themſelves; (in which conceit there is commonly as much of envy as gratitude) but ſurely they cannot mean that the grace which is limited to a few, is greater in itſelf, and

upon the whole matter, than that which is extended to a great many; it being a downright contradiction, to ſay that the grace of God is magnified by being confined. For at this rate of reaſoning, the leſſer it is, the greater it muſt be, and by undeniable conſequence would be greateſt of all, if it were none at all. So that it ſeems the grace of God may be extenuated in favour of ourſelves, but when we do ſo, we muſt ſay we magnify it.

Secondly, But to come cloſe to the objection; though it be true, that if God's grace in our converſion do not do all, it does not do ſo much as if it did all; yet this is really no injury or diſhonour to the grace of God; and though in ſome ſenſe it doth extenuate it, it doth not in truth and reality take off from the glory of it. In my opinion, the grace and favour of a Prince is not the leſs in offering a pardon to a traitor, who puts forth his hand and gladly receives it, than if he forced it upon him, whether he would or no. I am ſure, it is in the firſt caſe much fitter to give it, and he on whom it is conferred much better qualified to receive it. 'Tis no diſparagement to a Prince's favour, that it is beſtowed on one who is in ſome meaſure qualified to receive it. But be it more or leſs in one caſe than the other, this is certain, that in both caſes the man owes his life to the great grace and goodneſs of his Prince; and I cannot ſee how it leſſens the grace, that the miſerable object of it, the guilty and condemned perſon, was either by his humble ſubmiſſion, or thankful acceptance of it, in ſome degree better qualified to receive ſuch a favour, than an obſtinate refuſer of it.

Thirdly, Which is the principal conſideration of all, We muſt take great heed, that while we endeavour to make God to do all in the converſion of ſinners, we do not by this means charge upon him the ruin and deſtruction of impenitent ſinners, which I doubt we ſhould do, if we make the reaſon of their impenitency and ruin their utter impotency and diſability to repent; and we certainly make this the reaſon of their impenitency and ruin, if there be no other difference but this, between penitent and impenitent

nitent ſinners, namely, that in the one God works repentance by an irreſiſtible act of his power, ſo that he cannot but repent, and denies this grace to the other, without which he cannot poſſibly repent. But the ſcripture chargeth the deſtruction of men upon themſelves, and lays their impenitency at their own door. *O Iſrael! thou haſt deſtroyed thyſelf; but in me is thy help,* Hoſea xiii. 9. But where is the help, when the grace abſolutely neceſſary to repentance is denied? And how is their deſtruction of themſelves, if it is unavoidable, let them do what they can? Iſa. v. 3, 4. God appeals to his people Iſrael, that nothing was wanting on his part, that was fit and neceſſary to be done, that they might bring forth the fruits of repentance, and better obedience: *And now, O inhabitants of Jeruſalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, between me and my vineyard: what could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore when I looked that it ſhould bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?* Is it true that God hath done all that was neceſſary, to have brought them to repentance? Then if irreſiſtible grace be neceſſary, he afforded them that; but that was not afforded them, becauſe then they muſt unavoidably have repented, and there had been no cauſe for this complaint: if he did not afford it, but only the outward means of repentance without the inward grace (as ſome ſay;) then it is eaſy to judge why they did not repent, becauſe they could not; and there ſeems to be no cauſe either of wonder or complaint. Beſides, that it will be hard to juſtify that ſaying, *What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?* when it is acknowledged by the aſſertors of this doctrine, that the main thing was not done, and that without which all the reſt ſignified nothing, leaving them under the ſame impoſſibility of repentance, as if nothing at all had been done to them.

But now, upon our ſuppoſition, that ſufficient grace was afforded to them, which they wilfully neglected to make uſe of, the reaſon and equity of this complaint is evident, and God is acquitted, as having

done what was needful on his part, and the ſinner juſtly condemned, for not concurring with the grace of God, as he might have done; which ſhews that we are not merely paſſive in this work; but ſomething is expected from us, after God hath done his part, which if we neglect to do, our deſtruction is of ourſelves. Whereas the contrary ſuppoſition, upon pretence of glorifying God's grace, by making him to do all in the converſion of ſinners, indangers the honour of his juſtice, by laying the impenitency of ſinners, and their ruin conſequent upon it, at his door; which is to advance one attribute of God upon the ruin of another; whereas it is a fundamental principle of religion, to take care to reconcile the attributes and perfections of God to one another; for that is not a divine perfection which contradicts any other perfection.

The 3*d Objection* is grounded upon that queſtion of St. Paul, 1 Cor. iv. 7. *Who maketh thee to differ?* which they think impoſſible to be anſwered, if the efficacy of God's grace depend upon our concurrence and compliance with it. For, ſay they, when God offers his grace to two perſons for their repentance, if the true reaſon why the one repents, and the other remains impenitent, be this, that the one complieth with this grace of God, and yieldeth to it, the other reſiſts and ſtands out againſt it; then it is not the grace of God which makes the difference, for that is equal to both, but ſomething in themſelves, and ſo it is not God that makes them to differ but they themſelves.

But this queſtion is impertinent to this caſe. The Apoſtle ſpeaks it concerning ſpiritual gifts, upon account of which they factiouſly admired ſome of the Apoſtles above others, and concerning them the queſtion is very proper, *who maketh thee to differ?* Miraculous gifts were ſo ordered by God, that men were merely paſſive in the receiving of them, and contributed nothing to the obtaining of them; and therefore, if one had greater gifts than another, it was merely the pleaſure of God that made the difference. But the caſe is not the ſame in the graces of God's Spirit,

Spirit, towards the obtaining and improving whereof, we ourselves may contribute something; our Saviour having assured us, that *to him that hath, shall be given.* And here the question is not proper, nor is it true that the grace of God makes all the difference. It is indeed the foundation of all the good that is in us: but our different improvement makes different attainments in grace and goodness. Among those to whom the talents were intrusted, what made the difference between the man who wrapt his talent in the napkin, and buried it, and those who gained double by theirs, but that the one improved the grace conferred on him, the other neglected it, and this without any manner of reflexion upon, or diminution of the grace of God, or any danger from St. Paul's question, *who maketh thee to differ?* Put the case a pardon is offered to two malefactors, the one accepts, the other refuses it; their own choice makes the difference between them; but he that is saved is nevertheless beholden to the King's pardon for his life; and it were a senseless ingratitude in him, because he accepts the pardon, when the other refuseth it, to say that he did not owe his life to the grace and favour of his Prince, but might thank himself for it; whereas that he was in a capacity to accept a pardon, was wholly due to the clemency of his Prince, who offered it to him when he nowise deserved it. In this case the thing plainly appears as it is, by which every man may see, that it is against common sense to pretend that the grace of God is destroyed, if there be any compliance on our part with it; that it is no grace, if it be not forced upon us, and we be not merely passive in the reception of it. I proceed in the

Second place, to give a clear state of this matter, so as is most agreeable to the doctrine of the holy scriptures, and the essential attributes and perfections of God. In order to which, I will give you a short view of the several opinions concerning this matter. And there are two extreme and two middle opinions, concerning the operation of God's grace, in the conversion of a sinner.

The *firſt* of the extreme opinions is, that which all this while I have been arguing againſt, namely, that all that are converted and regenerated, are wrought upon in an irreſiſtible manner, and are merely paſſive in it; and that thoſe who are not thus wrought upon, their repentance and converſion is impoſſible. What the inconveniencies of this opinion are, I have ſhewed at large.

The other extreme opinion is, that none are thus wrought upon, becauſe it would be a violence and injury to man's natural liberty; but that ſufficient grace is offered to all, one time or other, who live under the goſpel, which they may comply with or reſiſt, and conſequently, if they be not brought to repentance, their impenitency and ruin is the effect of their own choice, and God is *free from the blood of all men.* But this opinion, though infinitely more reaſonable than the other, ſeems not to have any neceſſary foundation either in ſcripture or reaſon. There are ſome inſtances in Scripture of the converſion of men after a very violent, if not an irreſiſtible manner, which ſeems to be attributed to a particular predeſtination of God; as that of St. Paul, who ſays of himſelf, Gal. i. 15. that *he was ſeparated from his mother's womb to that work to which he was called*; and the manner of his converſion was anſwerable to ſuch a predeſtination; and there is nothing in reaſon againſt this, ſince it is no injury to any man to be made good and happy againſt his will.

The two middle opinions are theſe. *Firſt*, That irreſiſtible grace is afforded to all the elect, and ſufficient grace to all others who live under the goſpel, (for of thoſe only we ſpeak, the caſe of others being peculiar, and belonging to the extraordinary mercy of God) but then they ſay, that none of thoſe to whom this ſufficient grace is afforded ſhall effectually comply with it and be ſaved. This opinion ſeems more moderate, and hath this advantage in it, that it acquits the juſtice of God in the condemnation of thoſe, who having ſufficient grace afforded to them, did

did yet notwithſtanding continue impenitent; but yet it hath two great inconveniencies in it.

Firſt, That this ſuppoſition is to no purpoſe, as to any real effect for the ſalvation of men, becauſe not one perſon more is ſaved, notwithſtanding this univerſal ſufficient grace, which they ſay is afforded to all; for they take it for granted it is never effectual; and then it ſeems very unreaſonable to ſuppoſe that a means ſufficient to its end ſhould univerſally prove ineffectual; nay, on the contrary, it is next to a demonſtration againſt the ſufficiency of a means, if perpetually, and in all inſtances it fails of its end. This would tempt any man to think that ſurely there is ſome defect in it, or ſomething that hinders the efficacy of it; if being perpetually and generally afforded, it doth perpetually and univerſally miſcarry, without ſo much as one inſtance among ſo many millions to the contrary. So that this opinion ſeems rather to be contrived for a colour and ſhelter againſt ſome abſurdity, which men know not how to avoid otherwiſe, than to ſerve any good purpoſe, or to be embraced for the truth and probability of it.

The other middle opinion is, that ſome are converted in an irreſiſtible manner, when God pleaſeth, and whom he deſigns to be extraordinary examples and inſtruments for the good of others, and that ſufficient grace is afforded to others, which is effectual to the ſalvation of many, and rejected by a great many.

And this avoids all the inconveniency of the other opinion, and is evidently moſt agreeable both to the tenor of ſcripture, and to the beſt notions which men have concerning the attributes and perfections of God, and gives greateſt encouragement to the endeavours of men. It agrees very well with the ſolemn declarations of ſcripture, that God is not wanting on his part, to afford men ſufficient means to bring them to repentance; that *he deſires not the death of a ſinner, but rather that he ſhould turn from his wickedneſs and live*; that *he would have all men to be ſaved, and come to the knowledge of the truth*; that *he would not that any ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould*

ſhould come to repentance; that *mens deſtruction is of themſelves*. And this makes all the exhortations and motives of ſcripture to repentance, to be of ſome force and ſignificancy, and gives encouragement to the reſolutions and endeavours of men to become better. This clearly acquits the juſtice of God in the condemnation of impenitent ſinners, and fixeth the reaſon of their ruin upon their own choice. This perfectly reconciles the operation and aſſiſtance of God's grace in our converſion and regeneration, in our ſanctification and perſeverance in a good courſe, with the concurrence of our own endeavours, and makes thoſe plain texts of ſcripture have ſome ſenſe and ſignificancy in them; *work out your own ſalvation*; *repent and turn yourſelves from all your evil ways*; *make ye new hearts and new ſpirits*. Theſe are more than a thouſand metaphors to convince a man, that we may and ought to do ſomething towards our repentance and converſion. And if any man be ſure that we neither do, nor can do any thing in this work, then I am ſure that theſe texts ſignify nothing. Finally, thoſe texts which ſpeak moſt clearly of the neceſſity of the divine grace and aſſiſtance, to our doing of any thing that is ſpiritually good, do ſuppoſe ſomething to be done on our part. That of our Saviour, *without me ye can do nothing*, implies that with his grace and aſſiſtance we can. That of St. Paul, *I am able to do all things through Chriſt ſtrengthening me*, implies, that what we do by the ſtrength of Chriſt, is truly our own act; *I am able to do all things*. And this does not in the leaſt prejudice nor obſcure the glory of God's grace. St. Paul, it ſeems, knew very well how to reconcile theſe two, and to give the grace of God its due, without rejecting all concurrence of our own induſtry and endeavour, 1 Cor. xv. 10. *But by the grace of God I am what I am; and his grace which was beſtowed upon me was not in vain*, not becauſe it was irreſiſtible, and he merely paſſive in the reception of it; but becauſe he did concur and co-operate with it. So he tells us, *his grace that was beſtowed upon me was not in vain, but I laboured more abundantly than they*

they all; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. So that our concurrence and endeavour in the doing of any thing that is good, does not derogate from the grace of God, provided that we ascribe the good which we do to the assistance of divine grace, to which it is incomparably more due, than to our own activity and endeavour. And so St. Paul does, *I laboured abundantly; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.*

So that the glory of God's grace may be advanced to its due pitch, without asserting that we are merely passive to the operations of it. God's grace may be abundantly bestowed upon us, and yet we may labour abundantly; *God may work in us to will and to do,* and yet we *may work out our own salvation.* I have done with the second doctrine, grounded upon this metaphor of a new creature.

SERMON CIX.

Of the nature of regeneration, and its necessity, in order to justification and salvation.

GALAT. vi. 15.

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but a new creature.

The Fourth sermon on this text.

IN discoursing on these words, that which I was last upon was to shew, that this metaphor of a *new creature* doth not import what some would extend it to, and that so as to found doctrines of great consequence upon the single strength of this and other like metaphors, *viz.* such doctrines as these three:

First,

Firſt, That as the creation was by an irreſiſtible act of the divine power, ſo is this new creation, or the converſion of a ſinner.

Secondly, That as creatures were merely paſſive in their being made, and contributed nothing at all thereto, no more do we to our converſion and regeneration.

Thirdly, That as the creation was in an inſtant, only by the powerful word of God, ſo this new creation is in an inſtant, and admits of no degrees. The two firſt of theſe I have ſpoken to, and ſhewed, that as they had no neceſſary foundation in this and the like metaphors of ſcripture, ſo they are contrary to reaſon and experience, and the plain and conſtant tenor of ſcripture, which is the rule and meaſure of Chriſt's doctrine. I proceed now to conſider the

Third doctrine which is grounded upon this metaphor, namely, that as the creation of the ſeveral ranks and orders of creatures was in an inſtant, and effected by the powerful word of God, ſaying, Let ſuch and ſuch things be, and immediately they were; ſo this new creation is in an inſtant, and admits of no ſteps and degrees. And this doctrine is nothing elſe but a farther purſuit of the metaphor; and admitting the two former doctrines to be true, and well grounded upon this metaphor, this third doctrine follows well enough from them, for it is agreeable enough, that that which is effected by an irreſiſtible act of omnipotence, without any concurrence or operation on our part, ſhould be done in an inſtant, and all at once. Not that this is neceſſary, but that it is reaſonable; for why ſhould omnipotence uſe delays, and take time and proceed by degrees in the doing of that, which with the ſame eaſe it can do at once, and in an inſtant; eſpecially conſidering how well this ſuits with the other metaphors of ſcripture, as well as with this of a new creation, *viz.* the metaphor of regeneration and reſurrection. A child is born at once, and the dead ſhall be raiſed *in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.*

But

But notwithſtanding all this plauſible appearance and conſpiracy of metaphors, I ſhall ſhew that this doctrine of the converſion and regeneration of a ſinner being effected in an inſtant, and all at once, is not well grounded either upon ſcripture or experience. Not but that God can do ſo if he pleaſeth, and work this change in ſome much ſooner and quicker than in others; but there is nothing either in ſcripture or experience to perſuade us that this is the uſual, much leſs the conſtant and unalterable method of God's grace in the converſion of a ſinner, to bring it about in an inſtant, without any ſenſible ſteps and degrees.

But for the full clearing of this matter, I ſhall proceed by theſe ſteps:

Firſt, I ſhall ſhew upon what miſtaken grounds and principles this doctrine relies, beſides the metaphors already mentioned, which I have ſhewn to be of no force to prove the thing.

Secondly, I ſhall plainly ſhew what regeneration is; by which it will appear, that it is not neceſſarily effected in an inſtant, and at once, but admits of degrees.

Thirdly, That it is evidently ſo in experience of the ordinary method of God's grace, both in thoſe who are regenerated by a pious and religious education, and in thoſe who are reclaimed from a vicious courſe of life.

Fourthly, That all this is very conſonant and agreeable to what the ſcripture plainly and conſtantly declares concerning it.

Firſt, I ſhall diſcover ſeveral miſtakes upon which this doctrine is grounded, beſides the metaphors already mentioned, and which I have ſhewn to be of no force to prove the thing, *viz.* That regeneration is in an inſtant, and admits of no degrees. As,

1. That regeneration and ſanctification are not only different expreſſions, but do ſignify two things really different. But this is a groſs miſtake; for regeneration and ſanctification are but different expreſſions of the ſelf-ſame thing; for regeneration is a metaphor which the ſcripture uſeth to expreſs our tranſlation and change from one ſtate to another, from

from a ſtate of ſin and wickedneſs, to a ſtate of grace and holineſs, as if we were born over again, and were the children of another father, and from being the children of the Devil, did become the children of God; and ſanctification is our being made holy, our being purified and cleanſed from ſin and impurity. And hence it is that regeneration and ſanctification are attributed to the ſame cauſes, principal and inſtrumental, to the Spirit of God, and to the word of God; we are ſaid to be *born of the Spirit*, and to be *ſanctified by the Holy Ghoſt*; to be *begotten of the word of truth*, and to be *ſanctified by the truth*, which is *the word of God*. So that the ſcripture ſpeaks of them as the ſame thing; and they muſt needs be ſo; for if ſanctification be the making of us holy, and regeneration maketh us holy, then regeneration is ſanctification.

2. It is ſaid, that regeneration only ſignifies our firſt entrance into this ſtate, and ſanctification our progreſs and continuance in it. But this likewiſe is a great miſtake: For though it be true, that regeneration doth ſignify our firſt entrance into this ſtate, yet it is not true, that it only ſignifies that; for it is uſed likewiſe in ſcripture to ſignify our continuance in that ſtate; for Chriſtians are ſaid to be *the children of God*, and conſequently in a regenerate ſtate, not only in the inſtant of this change, but during their continuance in it. Beſides that our firſt change is as well called our ſanctification as our progreſs, and continuance in a ſtate of holineſs. So that neither in this is there any difference between regeneration and ſanctification. They do both of them ſignify both our firſt entrance into an holy ſtate, and our continuance and progreſs in it; though regeneration do more frequently denote the making of this change, and our firſt entrance into it.

3. It is ſaid, that one of the main differences between regeneration and ſanctification is this, that regeneration is incapable of degrees, and all that are regenerate are equally ſo, and one regenerate perſon is not more or leſs regenerate than another; whereas ſanctification is a gradual progreſs from one degree

gree of holineſs to another, and of them that are truly ſanctified and holy, one may be more ſanctified and more holy than another. But this likewiſe is a mere fancy and imagination, without any real ground. For as an unregenerate ſtate does plainly admit of degrees, ſo likewiſe doth the regenerate, and for the ſame reaſon. That an unregenerate ſtate admits of degrees is evident, in that ſome unregenerate perſons are more wicked than others, and thereby more the *children of wrath*, and the Devil, than others, which are the ſcripture expreſſions concerning the degrees of mens wickedneſs and impiety. In like manner, they that are more holy, and more like God, are more *the children of God*; and to be more a child of God, is ſurely to be more regenerate, that is, more *renewed after the image of God*, which conſiſts *in righteouſneſs and true holineſs*. So that it is a mere precarious aſſertion, and evidently falſe to affirm, that regeneration doth not admit of degrees, and that one is not more regenerate than another.

4thly and *laſtly*, They ground this conceit upon the doctrine of the ſchools, which teach, that in regeneration and converſion all the habits of grace are infuſed, *ſimul & ſemel, together and at once*. I confeſs I have no regard, much leſs a veneration for the doctrine of the ſchools, where it differs from that of the holy ſcriptures, which ſay not one word of infuſed habits, which yet are much talked of in divinity; and to ſpeak the truth, theſe words ſerve only to obſcure the thing. For to ſay, that in converſion the habits of all graces and virtues are infuſed together and at once, is to ſay, that in an inſtant men that were vicious before in ſeveral kinds, are by an omnipotent act of God's grace, and by a new principle infuſed into them, endued with the habits of the contrary graces and virtues, and are as chaſte, and temperate, and juſt and meek, and humble, as if by the frequent practice of theſe virtues they had become ſo. That this may be, and ſometimes is, I am ſo far from denying, that I believe it to be ſo. Some men, by an extraordinary power of

God's grace upon their hearts, are ſuddenly changed, and ſtrangely reclaimed from a very wicked and vicious, to a very religious and virtuous courſe of life; and that which others attain to by ſlower degrees, and great conflicts with themſelves, before they can gain the upper hand of their luſts, theſe arrive at all on a ſudden, by a mighty reſolution wrought in them by the power of God's grace, and as it were a new bias and inclination put upon their ſouls, equal to an habit gained by long uſe and cuſtom. This God ſometimes does, and when he does this, it may in ſome ſenſe be called the infuſion of the habits of grace and virtue together, and at once; becauſe the man is hereby endued with a principle of equal force and power, with habits that are acquired by long uſe and practice. A ſtrong and vigorous faith is the principle and root of all graces and virtues, and may have ſuch a powerful influence upon the reſolutions of our minds, and the government of our actions, that from this principle all graces and virtues may ſpring and grow up by degrees into habits; but then this principle is not formally but virtually, in the power and efficacy of it, the infuſion of the habits of every grace and virtue; and even in thoſe perſons in whom this change is ſo ſuddenly, and as it were at once, I doubt not but that the habits of ſeveral graces and virtues are afterwards attained by the frequent practice of them, in the virtue of this powerful principle of the faith of the goſpel, as I ſhall ſhew in the progreſs of this diſcourſe. And this I doubt not was very frequent and viſible in many of the firſt converts to Chriſtianity; eſpecially of thoſe, who from the abominable idolatry and impiety of heatheniſm were gained to the Chriſtian religion. The Spirit of God did then work very miraculouſly, as well in the cures of ſpiritual as of bodily diſeaſes. But then to make this the rule and ſtandard of God's ordinary proceedings in the converſion and regeneration of men, is equally unreaſonable, as ſtill to expect miracles for the cure of diſeaſes; and it is certain in experience, that this is

not

not God's ordinary method in the converſion of ſinners, as I ſhall fully ſhew by and by.

Secondly, I ſhall ſhew what regeneration *is*, by which it will plainly appear, that there is no neceſſity that it ſhould be effected in an inſtant, and at once, but that it will admit of degrees. I do not deny that it may be in an inſtant, and at once. The power of God is able to do this, and ſometimes does it very thoroughly, and very ſuddenly. But the queſtion is, whether there be a neceſſity it ſhould be ſo, and always be ſo. Now regeneration is the change of a man's ſtate, from a ſtate of ſin to a ſtate of holineſs, which becauſe it is an entrance upon a new kind or courſe of life, it is fitly reſembled to regeneration, or a new birth; to a new creation, the man being as it were quite changed or made over again, ſo as not to be, as to the main purpoſe and deſign of his life, the ſame man he was before. This is a plain ſenſible account of the thing, which every one may eaſily underſtand. Now there is nothing in reaſon, why a man may not gradually be changed, and arrive at this ſtate by degrees; as well as after this change is made, and he arrived at this ſtate of a regenerate man, he may by degrees grow and improve in it. But the latter no man doubts of, but that a man that is in a ſtate of grace, may grow and improve in grace; and there is as little reaſon to queſtion why a man may not come to this ſtate by degrees, as well as leap into it at once.

All the difficulty I know of in this matter is a mere nicety, that there is an inſtant, in which every thing begins, and therefore regeneration is in an inſtant; ſo that the inſtant before the man arrived at this ſtate, it could not be ſaid that he was regenerate; and the inſtant after he is in this ſtate, it cannot be denied that he is ſo. But this is idle ſubtilty, juſt as if a man ſhould prove that an houſe was built in an inſtant, becauſe it could not be ſaid to be built, till the inſtant it was finiſhed; though for all this, nothing is more certain than that it was built by degrees. Or, ſuppoſe the time of arriving at man's eſtate be at one and twenty, does it from

hence follow, that a man does not grow to be a man by degrees, but is made a man in an inſtant; becauſe juſt before one and twenty he was not at man's eſtate, and juſt then he was? Not but that God, if he pleaſe, can make a man in an inſtant, as he did Adam; but it is not neceſſary from this example, that all men ſhould be made ſo, much leſs does it follow from this vain ſubtilty. This is juſt the caſe. All the while the man is tending towards a regenerate ſtate, and is ſtruggling with his luſts, till by the power of God's grace and his own reſolution, he get the victory; all the while he is under the ſenſe and conviction of his ſinful and miſerable ſtate, and ſorrowing for the folly of his paſt life, and coming to an effectual purpoſe and reſolution of changing his courſe; and it may be ſeveral times thrown back by the temptations of the Devil, and the power of evil habits, and the weakneſs and inſtability of his own purpoſe; till at laſt by the grace of God following and aſſiſting him, he comes to a firm reſolution of a better life, which reſolution governs him for the future; I ſay all this while, which in ſome perſons is longer, in others ſhorter, according to the power of evil habits, and the different degrees of God's grace afforded to men; all this time the work of regeneration is going on; and though a man cannot be ſaid to be in a regenerate ſtate, till that very inſtant that the principle of grace and his good reſolution have got the upper hand of his luſts; yet it is certain for all this, that the work of regeneration was not effected in an inſtant. This is plainly and truly the caſe, as I ſhall ſhew in the *Third* particular I propounded, namely, that it is evident from experience, of the ordinary methods of God's grace, both in thoſe who are regenerate by a pious and religious education, and thoſe who are reclaimed from a vicious courſe of life.

The firſt ſort, namely, thoſe who are brought to goodneſs by a religious and virtuous education; theſe (at leaſt, ſo far as my obſervation reacheth) make up a very conſiderable part of the number of the regenerate, that is, of good men. And though it be certain

certain, considering the universal corruption and degeneracy of human nature, that there is a real change made in them, by the operation of God's grace upon their minds; yet it is as certain in experience, that this change is made in very many, by very silent and insensible degrees, till at length the seeds of religion, which were planted in them by a good education, do visibly prevail over all the evil inclinations of corrupt nature, so as to sway and govern the actions of their lives; and when the principles of grace and goodness do apparently prevail, we may conclude them to be in a regenerate state, though perhaps very few of these can give any account of the particular time and occasion of this change. For things may be seen in their effect, which were never very sensible in their cause. And it is very reasonable that such persons who never lived in any evil course should escape those pangs and terrors which unavoidably happen unto others, from a course of actual sin, and the guilt of a wicked life; and if there be any such persons as I have described, who are in this gradual and insensible manner regenerated, and made good, this is a demonstration, that there is no necessity that this change should be in an instant, it being so frequently found to be otherwise in experience.

And as for others, who are visibly reclaimed from a notorious wicked course, in these we likewise frequently see this change gradually made, by strong impressions made upon their minds, most frequently by the word of God; sometimes by his providence, whereby they are convinced of the evil and danger of their course, and awakened to consideration, and melted into sorrow and repentance; and perhaps exercised with great terrors of conscience, till at length by the grace of God they come to a fixt purpose and resolution of forsaking their sins, and turning to God; and after many strugglings and conflicts with their lusts, and the strong bias of evil habits, this resolution, assisted by the grace of God, doth effectually prevail, and make a real change both in the temper of their minds, and the course of their lives; and when this is done, and not be-

fore, they are ſaid to be regenerate. But all the while this was a-doing, the new man was forming, and the work of regeneration was going on; and it was perhaps a very conſiderable time from the firſt beginning of it, till it came to a fixt and ſettled ſtate. And this I doubt not in experience of moſt perſons who are reclaimed from a vicious courſe of life, is found to be the uſual and ordinary method of God's grace in their converſion. And if ſo, it is in vain to pretend that a thing is done in an inſtant, which by ſo manifold experience is found to take up a great deal of time, and to be effected by degrees.

And whereas ſome men are pleaſed to call all this the preparatory work to regeneration, but not the regeneration itſelf, this is an idle contention about words. For if theſe preparations be a degree of goodneſs, and a gradual tendency towards it, then the work is begun by them, and during the continuance of them, is all the while a-doing; and though it be hard to fix the point or inſtant when a man juſt arrives at this ſtate, and not before, yet it is very ſenſible when a man is in it, and this change, when it is really made, will ſoon diſcover itſelf by plain and ſenſible effects.

Fourthly and *laſtly*, All this is very agreeable to the plain and conſtant tenor of ſcripture, *Iſa.* i. 16. where the Prophet exhorts to this change, he ſpeaks of it as a gradual thing, *Waſh ye, make ye clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; ceaſe to do evil, learn to do well*; that is, break off evil and vicious habits, and gain the contrary habits of virtue and goodneſs by the exerciſe of it. The ſcripture ſpeaks of ſome as farther from a ſtate of grace than others, Jer. xiii. 23. *Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his ſpots? then may ye alſo do good, that are accuſtomed to do evil*; plainly declaring the great difficulty, equal almoſt to a natural impoſſibility, of reclaiming thoſe to goodneſs, who have been long habituated to an evil courſe. And the ſcripture ſpeaks of ſome as nearer to a ſtate of grace than others. Our Saviour tells the young man in the goſpel, who ſaid he had

kept

kept the commands of God from his youth, that he was *not far from the kingdom of God.* But now, if by an irresistible act of God's power, this change be made in an instant, and cannot otherwise be made, how is one man nearer to a state of grace, or farther from it than another? If all that are made good, must be made so in an instant, or not at all, then no man is nearer being made good than another; for if he were nearer to it, he might sooner be made so; but that cannot be, if all must be made good in an instant; for sooner than that no man can be made so. If the similitude of our being *dead in sins and trespasses* be strictly taken, no man is nearer a resurrection to a new life than another; as he that died but a week ago, is as far from being raised to life again, as he that died a thousand years ago; the resurrection of both requires an omnipotent act, and to that both are equally easy.

The two parables of our Saviour, Matth. xiii, 31, 33. are by many interpreters understood of the gradual operation of grace upon the hearts of men. That wherein *the kingdom of heaven is likened to a grain of mustard-seed, which being sown was the least of all seeds,* but by degrees *grew up to be the greatest of herbs*; and to *leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened*; intimating the progress of God's grace, which by degrees diffuseth itself over the whole temper of a man's mind, into all the actions of his life. To be sure the parable of the *seed which fell upon good ground,* does represent the efficacy of the word of God, accompanied by his grace upon the minds of men, and that is said to *spring up, and increase, and to bring forth fruit with patience*; which surely does express to us the gradual operation of God's word and grace in the renovation and change of a man's heart and life.

The New Testament indeed speaks of the sudden change of many upon the first preaching of the gospel, which I have told you before is not a standard of the ordinary method of God's grace; the not considering of which, hath been a great cause of all

the miſtakes in this matter. It is true, thoſe which were thus converted to the belief of the goſpel, their faith was a virtual principle of all grace and virtue, thoug not formally the habit of every particular grace. St. Paul himſelf, who was a prime inſtance of this kind, ſpeaks as if he acquired the grace of contentment by great conſideration, and diligent care of himſelf in ſeveral conditions; not as if the habit of this grace had been infuſed into him at once, Phil. iv. 11, 12. *I have learned in whatſoever ſtate I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abaſed, and I know how to abound, every where and in all things I am inſtructed, both to be full, and to be hungry, both to abound, and to ſuffer need.* And thus I have done with the firſt thing I propounded to conſider, namely, the true and juſt importance of this metaphor of the new creation. The two particulars which remain, I ſhall by God's aſſiſtance, finiſh in my next diſcourſe.

SERMON CX.

Of the nature of regeneration, and its neceſſity, in order to juſtification and ſalvation.

GALAT. vi. 15.

For in Chriſt Jeſus, neither circumciſion availeth any thing, nor uncircumciſion; but a new creature.

The fifth ſermon on this text.

THE obſervation I am ſtill upon from theſe words is this, *viz.* That in the Chriſtian religion nothing will avail to our juſtification, but the renovation of our hearts and lives, expreſt here by a new creature. In treating of which, I propoſed the doing of three things:

Firſt,

Firſt, To ſhew the true import of this metaphor of a *new creature*.

Secondly, To ſhew that this is the great condition of our juſtification; And,

Thirdly, That it is highly reaſonable that it ſhould be ſo.

In treating of the firſt of theſe particulars, I have conſidered ſome doctrines as founded upon this metaphor, which I have ſhewn at large not only to have no foundation in ſcripture, or reaſon or experience; but alſo to be very unreaſonable in themſelves, and contrary to the plain and conſtant tenor of ſcripture, and to the ordinary method of God's grace in the regeneration of men, whether by a religious and virtuous education, or in thoſe who are reclaimed from a notorious wicked courſe of life. And that I have ſo long inſiſted upon this argument, and handled it in a more contentious way than is uſual with me, did not proceed from any love to controverſy, which I am leſs fond of every day than other; but from a great deſire to put an end to theſe controverſies, and quarrellings in the dark, by bringing them to a clear ſtate and plain iſſue, and likewiſe to undeceive good men concerning ſome current notions and doctrines, which I do really believe to be diſhonourable to God, and contrary to the plain declarations of ſcripture, and a cauſe of great perplexity and diſcomfort to the minds of men, and a real diſcouragement to the reſolutions and endeavours of becoming better. Upon which conſiderations I was ſtrongly urgent to ſearch theſe doctrines to the bottom, and to contribute what in me lay, to the reſcuing of good men from the diſquiet and entanglement of them.

I will conclude this matter with a few cautions, not unworthy to be remembred by us; That we would be careful ſo to aſcribe all good to God, that we be ſure we aſcribe nothing to him that is evil, or any ways unworthy of him; That we do not make him the ſole author of our Salvation, in ſuch a way, as will unavoidably charge upon him the final impenitency and ruin of a great part of mankind; That we do not ſo magnify the grace of God, as to make

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his precepts and exhortations ſignify nothing; ſuch as theſe, *Make ye new hearts, and new ſpirits, ſtrive to enter in at the ſtrait gate*; where, if by *the ſtrait gate* be meant the difficulty of our firſt entrance upon a religious courſe, that is, of our converſion and regeneration, I cannot imagine how it is poſſible to reconcile our being merely paſſive in this work, and doing nothing at all in it, with our Saviour's precept of *ſtriving to enter in at the ſtrait gate*; unleſs to be very active, and to be merely paſſive about the ſame thing be all one, and an earneſt contention and endeavour be the ſame thing with doing nothing. Again, that we do not make the utmoſt degeneracy and depravation which men ever arrived at by the greateſt abuſe of themſelves, and the moſt vile and wicked practices, the ſtandard of an unregenerate ſtate, and of the common condition of all men by nature. And *laſtly*, That we do not make ſome particular inſtances in ſcripture, of the ſtrange and ſudden converſion of ſome perſons (as namely, of St. Paul and the Jaylor, in the Acts) the common rule and meaſure of every man's converſion; ſo that unleſs a man be as it were ſtruck down by a light and power from heaven, and taken with a fit of trembling, and frighted almoſt out of his wits, or find in himſelf ſomething equal to this, he can have no aſſurance of his converſion; whereas a much ſurer judgment may be made of the ſincerity of a man's converſion, by the real effects of this change, than by the manner of it. This our Saviour hath taught us, by that apt reſemblance of the operation of God's Spirit to the blowing of the wind, of the original cauſe whereof, and of the reaſon of its ceaſing or continuance, and why it blows ſtronger or gentler, this way or that way, we are altogether ignorant; but that it is, we are ſenſible from the ſound of it, John iii. 8. *The wind bloweth where it liſteth, and thou hearеſt the ſound of it, but canſt not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth: So is every one that is born of the Spirit.* The effects of God's Holy Spirit in the regeneration of men are ſenſible, though the manner and degrees of his operation upon the ſoula

ſouls of men are ſo various, that we can give no account of them; by which, one would think our Saviour had ſufficiently cautioned us, not to reduce the operations of God's grace and Holy Spirit in the regeneration of men, to any certain rule or ſtandard, but chiefly to regard the ſenſible effects of this ſecret work upon the hearts and lives of men.

And after all, it is in vain to contend by any arguments againſt clear and certain experience. If we plainly ſee that many are inſenſibly changed, and made good by pious education *in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*; and that ſome who have long lived in a profane neglect and contempt of religion, are by the ſecret power of God's word and Holy Spirit, upon calm conſideration, without any great terrors and amazement, viſibly changed and brought to a better mind and courſe; it is in vain in theſe caſes to pretend that this change is not real, becauſe the manner of it is not anſwerable to ſome inſtances which are recorded in ſcripture, or which we have obſerved in our experience; and becauſe theſe perſons cannot give ſuch an account of the time and manner of their converſion, as is agreeable to theſe inſtances; which is juſt as if I ſhould meet a man beyond ſea, whom I had known in England, and would not believe that he had croſt the ſeas, becauſe he ſaid he had a ſmooth and eaſy paſſage, and was wafted over by a gentle wind, and could tell no ſtories of ſtorms and tempeſts.

And thus I have fully and faithfully endeavoured to open to you the juſt importance of this phraſe or expreſſion in the text, of *the new creature*, or the *new creation*. I proceed to the

Second particular I propounded, namely, that the real renovation of our hearts and lives, is according to the terms of the goſpel, and the Chriſtian religion, the great condition of our juſtification and acceptance with God, and that this is the ſame in ſenſe and ſubſtance with thoſe phraſes in the parallel texts to this, of *faith perfected by charity*, and of *keeping the commandments of God*.

That according to the terms of the goſpel, the great

great condition of our juſtification and acceptance with God, is the real renovation of our hearts and lives, is plain, not only from this text, which affirms, that in the Chriſtian religion nothing will avail us but *the new creature*; but likewiſe from many other clear texts of ſcripture; and this, whether by juſtification be meant our firſt juſtification upon our faith and repentance, or our continuance in this ſtate, or our final juſtification by our ſolemn acquittal and abſolution at the great day, which in ſcripture is called ſalvation, and eternal life.

That this is the condition of our firſt juſtification, that is, of the forgiveneſs of our ſins, and our being received into the grace and favour of God, is plain from all thoſe texts, where this change is expreſt by our repentance and converſion, by our regeneration and renovation, by our purification and ſanctification, or by any other terms of the like importance. For under every one of theſe notions, this change is made the condition of the forgiveneſs of our ſins, and acceptance to the favour of God.

Under the notion of repentance and converſion, Acts ii. 38. *Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jeſus Chriſt, for the remiſſion of ſins.* Acts iii. 19. *Repent and be converted, that your ſins may be blotted out.* Upon the ſame account, the penitent acknowledgment of our ſins, which is an eſſential part of repentance, is made a condition of the forgiveneſs of them, 1 John i. 9. *If we confeſs our ſins, he is faithful and juſt to forgive us our ſins, and to cleanſe us from all unrighteouſneſs.* Under the notion of regeneration and renovation, 2 Cor. v. 17. *If any man be in Chriſt,* that is, become a true Chriſtian, which is all one with being in a juſtified ſtate, *he is a new creature; old things are paſt away, behold all things are become new.* Tit. iii. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7. where the Apoſtle declares at large, what change is required to put us into a juſtified ſtate, and to intitle us to the inheritance of eternal life, *For we ourſelves were alſo ſometimes fooliſh, diſobedient, deceived, ſerving divers luſts and pleaſures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But*

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after that the kindneſs and love of God our Saviour towards man appeared, not by works of righteouſneſs which we have done, that is, not for any precedent righteouſneſs of ours, for we were great ſinners, *but according to his mercy he ſaved us, by the waſhing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghoſt, which he ſhed on us abundantly through Jeſus Chriſt our Saviour, that being juſtified by his grace, we ſhould be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.* So that the change of our former temper, and converſion and regeneration, and *the renewing of the Holy Ghoſt*, is antecedently neceſſary to our juſtification, that is, to the pardon of our ſins, and our reſtitution to the favour of God, and the hope of eternal life. So likewiſe under the notion of purification and ſanctification, 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10, 11. where the Apoſtle enumerates ſeveral ſins and vices, which will certainly exclude men from the favour and kingdom of God, from which we muſt be cleanſed, before we can be juſtified or ſaved: *Know ye not that the unrighteous ſhall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, ſhall inherit the kingdom of God. And ſuch were ſome of you: but ye are waſhed, but ye are ſanctified, but ye are juſtified, in the name of the Lord Jeſus, and by the Spirit of our God.* 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18. where the Apoſtle likewiſe makes our purification a condition of our being received into the favour of God, and recko-ed into the number of his children: *Touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a father unto you, and ye ſhall be my ſons and daughters, ſaith the Lord Almighty.* And that by *not touching the unclean thing*, is here certainly meant our ſanctification and purification from ſin, is evident from what immediately follows in the beginning of the next chapter: *Having therefore theſe promiſes, dearly beloved, let us cleanſe ourſelves from all filthineſs of the fleſh and ſpirit, perfecting holineſs in the fear of God*; that is, having this encouragement, that upon this condition we ſhall be received to the favour

of God, let us purify ourſelves, that we may be capable of this great bleſſing.

And our continuance in this ſtate of grace and favour with God, depends upon our perſeverance in holineſs; for *if any man draw back, my ſoul ſhall have no pleaſure in him.*

And laſtly, this is alſo the condition of our final juſtification, and abſolution by the ſentence of the great day, Mat. v. 8. *Bleſſed are the pure in heart; for they ſhall ſee God.* John iii. 3. *Except a man be born again he cannot ſee the kingdom of God.* Heb. xii. 14. *Follow holineſs, without which no man ſhall ſee the Lord.* 1 John iii. 3. the Apoſtle there ſpeaking of the ſight and enjoyment of God, tells us what we muſt do, if ever we hope to be partakers of it: *Every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himſelf, even as he is pure.*

And this condition here mentioned in the text, of our being *new creatures*, is the ſame in ſenſe and ſubſtance with thoſe expreſſions which we find in the two parallel texts to this, where *faith which is perfected by charity*, and *keeping the commandments of God*, are made the condition of our juſtification and acceptance with God. Gal. v. 6. *In Chriſt Jeſus neither circumciſion availeth any thing, nor uncircumciſion; but faith, which is conſummate*, or *made perfect by charity*; and 1 Cor. vii. 19. *Circumciſion is nothing, and uncircumciſion is nothing; but the keeping of the commandments of God.* It is evident that the deſign and meaning of theſe three texts is the ſame, and therefore theſe three expreſſions of the *new creature*, and of *faith perfected by charity*, and of *keeping the commandments of God*, do certainly ſignify the ſame thing. That the *new creature* ſignifies the change of our ſtate, from a ſtate of diſobedience and ſin, to a ſtate of obedience and holineſs of life, I have ſhewn at large; and the Apoſtle explaining this *new creation*, moſt expreſly tells us, Epheſ. ii. 10. *We are his workmanſhip, created in Chriſt Jeſus unto good works, which God hath before ordained, that we ſhould walk in them*; and Col. iii. 10, 12, 13, 14. where the Apoſtle tells them, that

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they ought to give testimony of their renovation, and having put on the *new man*, by all the fruits of obedience and goodness; *ye have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge, after the image of him that created him. Put on therefore as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another; and above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfection.* And the Apostle St. Peter tells us, that our regeneration, which he calls *sanctification of the Spirit, is unto obedience*, 1 Pet. i. 2. So that our renovation consisteth in the principle and practice of obedience, and a good life; and what is this but *faith perfected by charity?* And *charity*, the Apostle tells us, *is the fulfilling of the law*; and what is *the fulfilling of the law*, but *keeping the commandments of God?* And *keeping the commandments of God*, or at least a sincere resolution of obedience, when there is not time and opportunity for the trial of it, is in scripture as expressly made a condition both of our present and final justification and acceptance with God, as faith is, and in truth is the same with a *living and operative faith*, and *a faith that is consummate, and made perfect by charity*. Acts x. 34, 35. *Of a truth, I perceive* (saith Peter) *that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him*; which speech does, as plainly as words can do any thing, declare to us upon what terms all mankind, of what condition or nation soever, may find acceptance with God, Rom. ii. 6, 7, 8, 9, 10. *who will render to every man according to his deeds, to them who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality; eternal life: but to them who are contentious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness; indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doth evil; of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile: but glory, honour and peace to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile.* As to our acceptance with God,

and the rewards of another world, it matters not whether Jew or Gentile, circumciſed or uncircumciſed; that which maketh the difference, is *obeying the truth*, or *obeying unrighteouſneſs*; working good, or doing evil; theſe are the things which will avail to our juſtification, or condemnation at the great day. To the ſame purpoſe is that ſaying of the Apoſtle to the Hebrews, chap. v. 9. that *Chriſt is the author of eternal ſalvation to them that obey him.*

I will conclude this matter with two remarkable ſayings, the one towards the beginning, the other towards the end of the Bible, to ſatisfy us that this *is* the tenor of the holy ſcriptures, and the conſtant doctrine of it from the beginning to the end, Gen. iv. 7. It is God's ſpeech to Cain, *If thou doſt well, ſhalt thou not be accepted?* And Rev. xxii. 14. *Bleſſed are they who do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.*

And thus I have done with the ſecond thing I propounded, which was to ſhew, that according to the terms of the goſpel, and the Chriſtian religion, the real renovation of our hearts and lives is the great condition of our juſtification and acceptance with God, and that this in ſenſe and ſubſtance is the ſame with *faith made perfect by charity*, and *keeping the commandments of God.*

The third and laſt particular remains to be ſpoken to, namely, That it is highly reaſonable that this ſhould be the condition of our juſtification, and acceptance to the favour of God; and that upon theſe two accounts:

Firſt, For the honour of God's holineſs.

Secondly, In order to the qualifying of us for the favour of God, and the enjoyment of him, for the pardon of our ſins, and the reward of eternal life.

Firſt, For the honour of God's holineſs. For ſhould God have received men to his favour, and rewarded them with eternal glory and happineſs, for the mere belief of the goſpel, or a confident perſuaſion that Chriſt would ſave them without any change of their hearts and lives, without *repentance from dead works*, and

and *fruits meet for repentance*, and *amendment of life*; he had not given ſufficient teſtimony to the world of his love to holineſs and righteouſneſs, and of his hatred of ſin and iniquity. The Apoſtle tells us, that God in the juſtification of a ſinner *declares his righteouſneſs*. But ſhould he juſtify men upon other terms, this would not declare his righteouſneſs and love of holineſs, but rather an indifferency, whether men were good and righteous or not. For a bare aſſent to the truth of the goſpel, without the fruits of holineſs and obedience, is not *a living*, but *a dead faith*, and ſo far from being acceptable to God, that it is an affront to him; and a confident reliance upon Chriſt for ſalvation, while we continue in our ſins, is not a juſtifying faith, but a bold and impudent preſumption upon the mercy of God, and the merits of our Saviour; who indeed *juſtifies the ungodly*, that is, thoſe that have been ſo, but not thoſe that continue ſo. And if God ſhould pardon ſinners, and reward them with eternal life, upon any other terms than upon our becoming *new creatures*, than upon ſuch a faith as is *made perfect by charity*, that is, by *keeping the commandments of God*; this would be ſo far from *declaring his righteouſneſs*, and being a teſtimony of his hatred and diſpleaſure againſt ſin, that it would give the greateſt countenance and encouragement to it imaginable.

Secondly, It is likewiſe very reaſonable, that ſuch a faith, that makes us *new creatures*, and is *perfected by charity*, and *keeping the commandments of God*, ſhould be the condition of juſtification, in order to the qualifying of us for the pardon of our ſins, and the reward of eternal life; that is, for the favour of God, and for the enjoyment of him. To forgive men upon other terms, were to give countenance and encouragement to perpetual rebellion, and diſobedience. That man is not fit to be forgiven, who is ſo far from being ſorry for his fault, that he goes on to offend; he is utterly incapable of mercy, who is not ſenſible that he hath done amiſs, and reſolved to amend. No Prince ever thought a rebellious ſubject capable of pardon upon lower terms than theſe.

It is in the nature of the thing unfit that an obſtinate offender ſhould have any mercy or favour ſhewn to him.

And as without repentance and reſolution of better obedience, we are unfit for forgiveneſs, ſo much more for a reward: As we cannot expect God's favour, ſo we are incapable of the enjoyment of him without holineſs. Holineſs is the image of God, and makes us like to him; and till we be like him, we cannot ſee him, we can have no enjoyment of him. All delightful communion and agreeable ſociety is founded in a ſimilitude of diſpoſition and manners, and therefore ſo long as we are unlike to God in the temper and diſpoſition of our minds, and in the actions and courſe of our lives, neither can God take pleaſure in us, nor we in him, but there will be a perpetual jarring and diſcord between him and us; and tho' we were in heaven, and ſeated in the place of the bleſſed, yet we ſhould not, nay we could not be happy; becauſe we ſhould want the neceſſary materials and ingredients of happineſs. For it is with the ſoul in this reſpect, as it is with the body; though all things be eaſy without us, and no cruelty be exerciſed upon us, to give torment and vexation to us, yet if we be inwardly diſeaſed, we may have pain and anguiſh enough, we may be as it were upon the rack, and feel as great torment from the inward diſorder of our humours, as if we were tortured from without. So it is with the ſoul. Sin and vice are internal diſeaſes, which do naturally create trouble and diſcontent; and nothing but diverſion, and the variety of objects and pleaſures which entertain men in this world, hinders a wicked man from being out of his wits, whenever he reflects upon himſelf; for all the irregular appetites and paſſions, luſt, and malice, and revenge, are ſo many furies within us; and though there were no Devil to torment us, yet the diſorder of our own minds, and the horrors of a guilty conſcience would be a hell to us, and make us extremely miſerable in the very regions of happineſs. So that it is neceſſary that our faith ſhould be *made perfect by charity*, and that we ſhould become

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new creatures, not only from the arbitrary conſtitution and appointment of God, but from the nature and reaſon of the thing; becauſe nothing but this can diſpoſe us for that bleſſedneſs, which God hath promiſed to us, and prepared for us. Faith conſidered abſtractly from the fruits of holineſs and obedience, of goodneſs and charity, will bring no man into the favour of God. All the excellency of faith is, that it is the principle of a good life, and furniſheth us with the beſt motives and arguments thereto, the promiſes and threatnings of the goſpel; and therefore in heaven, when we come to ſight and enjoyment, faith and hope ſhall ceaſe, but *charity never faileth*; for if it ſhould, heaven would ceaſe to be heaven to us, becauſe it is the very frame and temper of happineſs; and if this diſpoſition be not wrought in us in this world, we ſhall be altogether incapable of the felicity of the other.

You ſee then what it is that muſt recommend us to the favour of God; the real renovation of our hearts and lives, after the image of him that created us. This muſt be repaired in us, before ever we can hope to be reſtored to the grace and favour of God, or to be capable of the reward of eternal life. And what could God have done more reaſonable, than to make theſe very things the terms of our ſalvation, which are the neceſſary cauſes and means of it? How could he have dealt more mercifully and kindly with us, than to appoint that to be the condition of our happineſs, which is the only qualification that can make us capable of it?

I will conclude all with that excellent paſſage in the wiſdom of Solomon, chap. vi. 17, 18. *The very true beginning of wiſdom is the deſire of diſcipline, and the care of diſcipline is love, and love is the keeping of her laws, and taking heed to her laws is the aſſurance of incorruption.* The ſum of what I have ſaid upon this argument amounts to this, that upon the terms of the goſpel we can have no hope of the forgiveneſs of our ſins, and eternal ſalvation, unleſs our nature be renewed, and the image of God, which is defaced by ſin, be repaired in us, and we be

be *created in Chriſt unto good works*; That no faith will avail to our juſtification and acceptance with God, but that which is *made perfect by charity*, that is, by *fulfilling of the law, and keeping the commandments of God*; by ſincere obedience and holineſs of life, which notwithſtanding the unavoidable imperfection of it in this ſtate, will nevertheleſs be accepted with God, through the merits of our bleſſed Saviour, *who hath loved us, and waſhed us from our ſins in his own blood. To whom be glory for ever.* Amen.

SERMON CXI.

The danger of all known ſin, both from the light of nature and revelation.

ROM. i. 18, 19.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of men, who hold the truth in unrighteouſneſs; becauſe that which may be known of God is manifeſt in them, for God hath ſhewed it unto them.

The firſt ſermon on this text.

IN the beginning of this chapter, the Apoſtle declares that he was particularly deſigned and appointed by God to preach the goſpel to the world, and that he was not aſhamed of his miniſtry, notwithſtanding all the reproach and perſecution it was attended withal, and notwithſtanding the ſlight and undervaluing opinion which the world had of the doctrine which he preached, it being *to the Jews a ſtumbling block, and to the Greeks fooliſhneſs*; for tho' this might reflect ſome diſparagement upon it in the eſteem of ſenſual and carnal men, yet to thoſe who weighed things impartially, and conſidered the excellent end and deſign of the Chriſtian doctrine, and the force-

force and efficacy of it to that end, it will appear to be an inſtrument admirably fitted by the wiſdom of God, for the reformation and ſalvation of mankind.

And therefore he tells us, ver. 16. that how much ſoever it was deſpiſed by that ignorant and inconſiderate age, *he was not aſhamed of the goſpel of Chriſt; becauſe it is the power of God unto ſalvation, to every one that believeth, to the Jew firſt, and alſo to the Greek*; that is, the doctrine of the goſpel ſincerely believed and embraced, is a moſt proper and powerful means, deſigned by God for the ſalvation of makind; not only of the Jews, but alſo of the Gentiles.

The revelations which God had formerly made, were chiefly reſtrained to the Jewiſh nation; but this great and laſt revelation of the goſpel, was equally calculated for the benefit and advantage of all mankind. The goſpel indeed was firſt preached to the Jews, and from thence publiſhed to the whole world; and as this doctrine was deſigned for the general benefit of mankind, ſo it was very likely to be effectual to that end, being an inſtrument equally fitted for the ſalvation of the whole world, Gentiles as well as Jews; *it is the power of God to ſalvation, to every one that believes, to the Jew firſt, and alſo to the Greek.*

And to ſhew the efficacy of it, he inſtanceth in two things, which render it ſo powerful and effectual a means for the ſalvation of mankind:

Firſt, Becauſe therein the grace and mercy of God, in the juſtification of a ſinner, and declaring him righteous, is ſo clearly revealed, ver. 17. *For therein is the righteouſneſs of God revealed, from faith to faith: as it is written, The juſt ſhall live by faith.* This is very obſcurely expreſt, but the meaning of this text will be very much cleared, by comparing it with another in the third chapter of this epiſtle, ver. 20, 21, 22, *&c.* where the Apoſtle ſpeaks more fully and expreſly of the way of our juſtification by the faith of Jeſus Chriſt, that is, by the belief of the goſpel. He aſſerts at the 20th verſe, that *by the deeds*

doth expoſe men to this great danger. *The wrath of God is* ſaid to be *revealed againſt all ungodlineſs, and unrighteouſneſs of men.*

Fourthly, That it is a very great aggravation of ſin, for men to offend againſt the light of their own minds. The Apoſtle here aggravates the impiety and wickedneſs of the heathen world, that they did not live up to the knowledge which they had of God, but contradicted it in their lives, which he calls *holding the truth in unrighteouſneſs.*

Fifthly, The natural knowledge which men have of God, if they live wickedly, is a clear evidence of their *holding the truth in unrighteouſneſs.* The Apoſtle therefore chargeth them with *holding the truth in unrighteouſneſs*, becauſe *that which may be known of God, is manifeſted in them, God having ſhewed it to them.*

Sixthly and laſtly, That the clear revelation of the wrath of God in the goſpel, againſt the impiety and wickedneſs of men, renders it a very powerful and likely means for the recovery and ſalvation of men. For the Apoſtle proves *the goſpel of Chriſt* to be *the power of God to ſalvation*, becauſe *therein the wrath of God is revealed from heaven againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of men, who hold the truth in unrighteouſneſs*; that is, againſt all impenitent ſinners.

I ſhall at the preſent, by God's aſſiſtance, ſpeak to the three firſt of theſe particulars.

Firſt, The infinite danger that a wicked ſinful courſe doth plainly expoſe men to. If there be a God that made the world, and governs it, and takes care of mankind, and hath given them laws and rules to live by, he cannot but be greatly diſpleaſed at the violation and tranſgreſſion of them; and certainly the diſpleaſure of God is the moſt dreadful thing in the world, and the effects of it the moſt inſupportable. The greateſt fear is from the greateſt danger, and the greateſt danger is from the greateſt power offended and enraged; and this is a conſideration exceeding full of terror, that by a ſinful courſe we expoſe ourſelves to the utmoſt diſpleaſure of the great

great and terrible God; for *who knows the power of his wrath? and who may ſtand before him when once he is angry? According to thy fear, ſo is thy wrath,* (ſaith the Pſalmiſt.) There is no paſſion in the mind of man that is more boundleſs and infinite than our *fear,* it is apt to make wild and frightful repreſentations of evils, and to imagine them many times greater than really they are; but in this caſe our imagination muſt fall ſhort of the truth and terror of the thing; for the wrath of God doth far exceed the utmoſt jealouſy and ſuſpicion of the moſt fearful and guilty conſcience; and the greateſt ſinner under his greateſt anguiſh and deſpair, cannot apprehend or fear it more than there is reaſon for; *according to thy fear, ſo is thy wrath.*

If it were only the wrath and diſpleaſure of men that the ſinner were expoſed to, there might be reaſon enough for fear, becauſe they have many times power enough to cruſh an offender, and cruelty enough to fret every vein of his body, and to torment him in every part: but the wrath and vengeance of men bears no compariſon with the wrath of God. Their paſſions are many times ſtrong and bluſtering; but their arm is but ſhort, and their power ſmall; *they have not an arm like God, nor can they thunder with a voice like him.* They may deſign conſiderable harm and miſchief to us; but it is not always in the power of their hand to wreck their malice upon us, and to execute all the miſchief which their inraged minds may prompt them to. The very utmoſt they can deſign, is to torment our bodies, and to take away our lives, and when they have deſigned this, they may dy firſt, and *return to their duſt, and then their thoughts periſh with them,* and all their malicious deſigns are at an end; they are always under the power and government of a ſuperior Being, and can go no further than he gives them leave. However, if they do their worſt, and ſhoot all their arrows at us, we cannot ſtand at the mark long, their wrath will ſoon make an end of us, and ſet us free from all their cruelty and oppreſſion; *they can but kill the body, and after that they have*

no more that they can do. Their moſt refined malice cannot reach our ſpirits; no weapon that can be formed by the utmoſt art of man can pierce or wound our ſouls; they can drive us out of this world, but they cannot purſue us into the other: ſo that at the worſt the grave will be a ſanctuary to us, and death a ſafe retreat from all their rage and fury.

But the wrath of God is not confined by any of theſe limits. *Once hath God ſpoken* (ſaith David, by an elegant Hebrew phraſe to expreſs the certainty of the thing) *once hath God ſpoken, and twice I have heard this, that power belongt to God,* Pſal. lxii. 11. *He hath a mighty arm,* and when he pleaſeth to ſtretch it out, none may ſtay it, nor *ſay unto him, what doſt thou?* He hath power enough to make good all his threatnings, whatever he ſays he is able to effect, and whatever he purpoſeth he can bring to paſs; for *his counſel ſhall ſtand, and he will accompliſh all his pleaſure.* He need but ſpeak the word, and it is done; for we can neither reſiſt his power, nor fly from it: if we fly to the utmoſt parts of the earth, his hand can reach us, for *in his hand are all the corners of the earth*; if we take refuge in the grave (and we cannot do that without his leave) thither his wrath can follow us; and there it will overtake us: for his power is not confined to this world, nor limited to our bodies; *after he hath killed, he can deſtroy both body and ſoul in hell.*

And this is that *wrath of God* which is *revealed from heaven,* and which the Apoſtle chiefly intends, *viz.* the miſery and puniſhment of another world. This God hath threatned ſinners withal; to expreſs which to us, as fully as words can do, he heaps up in the next chapter ſo many weighty and terrible words, *indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguiſh upon every ſoul of man that doth evil*; in oppoſition to that great and glorious reward of *immortality and eternal life,* which is promiſed to *a patient continuance in well-doing.*

So that *the wrath of God,* which is here denounced *againſt the impiety and unrighteouſneſs of men,* comprehends all the evils and miſeries of this and

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the other world, which every ſinner is in danger of whilſt he continues impenitent; for as according to the tenor of the goſpel, *godlineſs hath the promiſes of this life and of that which is to come,* ſo impenitency in ſin expoſeth men to the evils of both worlds, to the judgments of the *life that now is,* and to the endleſs and intolerable torments of *that which is to come.* And what can be more dreadful than the diſpleaſure of an almighty and eternal Being, who can puniſh to the utmoſt, and who lives for ever to execute his wrath and vengeance upon ſinners? ſo that well might the Apoſtle ſay, *it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

Conſider this all ye that forget God, that neglect him, and live in continual diſobedience to his holy and righteous laws; much more thoſe who deſpiſe and affront him, and live in a perpetual defiance of him. *Will ye provoke the Lord to jealouſy? are ye ſtronger than he?* Think of it ſeriouſly, and forget him if you can, deſpiſe him if you dare; conſider this, leſt he take you into conſideration, and rouze like a lion out of ſleep, and *tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.* This is the firſt obſervation, the infinite danger that a wicked and ſinful courſe doth expoſe men to, the wrath of God, which doth not only ſignify more than all the evils that we know, but than all thoſe which the wildeſt fears and ſuſpicions of our minds can imagine.

Secondly, The next thing obſervable, is the clear and undoubted revelation which the goſpel has made of this danger, *the wrath of God is revealed,* &c. By which the Apoſtle intimates to us, that this was but obſcurely known to the world before, at leaſt in compariſon of that clear diſcovery which the goſpel hath now made of it; ſo that I may allude to that expreſſion in Job, which he applies to death and the grave, that *hell is naked before us, and deſtruction hath no covering.*

Not but that mankind had always apprehenſions and jealouſies of the danger of a wicked life, and ſinners were always afraid of the vengeance of God purſuing their evil deeds, not only in this life, but

after it too; and though they had turned the puniſhments of another world into ridiculous fables, yet the wiſer ſort of mankind could not get it out of their minds, that there was ſomething real under them; and that Ixion's wheel, which by a perpetual motion carried him about; and Siſyphus his ſtone, which he was perpetually rolling up the hill, and when he had got it near the top, tumbled down, and ſtill created him a new labour; and Tantalus his continual hunger and thirſt, aggravated by a perpetual nearneſs of enjoyment, and a perpetual diſappointment; and Prometheus his being chained to a rock, with an eagle or vulture perpetually preying upon his liver, which grew as faſt as it was gnawed; I ſay, even the wiſer among the heathens looked upon theſe as fantaſtical repreſentations of ſomething that was real, *viz.* the grievous and endleſs puniſhment of ſinners, the not to be endured, and yet perpetually renewed torments of another world: for in the midſt of all the ignorance and degeneracy of the heathen world, mens conſciences did accuſe them when they did amiſs, and they had ſecret fears and miſgivings of ſome mighty danger hanging over them from the diſpleaſure of a ſuperior Being, and the apprehenſion of ſome great miſchiefs likely to follow their wicked actions, which ſometime or other would overtake them; which becauſe they did not always in this world, they dreaded them in the next. And this was the foundation of all thoſe ſuperſtitions, whereby the ancient Pagans endeavoured to carefully to appeaſe their offended deities, and to avert the calamities which they feared they would ſend down upon them. But all this while they had no certain aſſurance by any clear and expreſs revelation from God to that purpoſe, but only the jealouſies and ſuſpicions of their own minds, naturally conſequent upon thoſe notions which men generally had of God; but ſo obſcured and depraved by the luſts and vices of men, and by the groſs and falſe conceptions which they had of God, that they only ſerved to make them ſuperſtitious, but were not clear and ſtrong enough to make them wiſely and ſeriouſly religious.

And

And to speak the truth, the more knowing and inquisitive part of the heathen world had brought all these things into great doubt and uncertainty, by the nicety and subtilty of disputes about them; so that it was no great wonder that these principles had no greater effect upon the lives of men, when their apprehensions of them were so dark and doubtful.

But the gospel hath made a most clear and certain revelation of these things to mankind. It was written before upon mens hearts as the great sanction of the law of nature, but the impressions of this were in a great measure blurred and worn out, so that it had no great power and efficacy upon the minds and manners of men; but now it is clearly discovered to us, *the wrath of God is revealed from heaven*, which expression may well imply in it these three things:

First, The clearness of the discovery; *the wrath of God* is said to be *revealed*.

Secondly, The extraordinary manner of it; it is said to be *revealed from heaven*.

Thirdly, The certainty of it; not being the result of subtle and doubtful reasonings, but having a divine testimony and confirmation given to it, which is the proper meaning of *being revealed from heaven*.

First, It imports the clearness of the discovery. The punishment of sinners in another world is not so obscure a matter as it was before; it is now expressly declared in the gospel, together with the particular circumstances of it, namely, that there is another life after this, wherein men shall receive the just *recompence of reward* for all the actions done by them in this life; that there is a particular time appointed, wherein God will call all the world to a solemn account, and those who are in their graves shall by a powerful voice be raised to life, and those who shall then be found alive, shall be suddenly changed; when our Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal and only begotten Son of God, who once came in great humility to save us, shall come again *in power and great glory*, attended with *his mighty Angels*,

and all nations ſhall be gathered before him; and all mankind ſhall be ſeparated into two companies, the righteous and the wicked, who, after a full hearing, and fair trial, ſhall be ſentenced according to their actions, the one to eternal life and happineſs, the other to everlaſting miſery and torment.

So that the goſpel hath not only declared the thing to us, that there ſhall be a future judgment; but, for our farther aſſurance and ſatisfaction in this matter, and that theſe things might make a deep impreſſion, and ſtrike a great awe upon our minds, God hath been pleaſed to reveal it to us with a great many particular circumſtances, ſuch as are very worthy of God, and apt to fill the minds of men with dread and aſtoniſhment, as often as they think of them.

For the circumſtances of this judgment revealed to us in the goſpel, are very ſolemn and awful, not ſuch as the wild fancies and imaginations of men would have been apt to have dreſt it up withal, ſuch as are the fictions of the heathen Poets, and the extravagancies of Mahomet; which though they be terrible enough, yet they are withal ridiculous; but ſuch as are every way becoming the majeſty of the great God, and the ſolemnity of the great day, and ſuch as do not in the leaſt ſavour of the vanity and lightneſs of human imagination.

For what more fair and equal, than that men ſhould be tried by a man like themſelves, one of the ſame rank and condition, that had experience of the infirmities and temptations of human nature? So our Lord tells us, that *the Father hath committed all judgment to the Son, becauſe he is the ſon of man*, and therefore cannot be excepted againſt, as not being a fit and equal judge. And this St. Paul offers as a clear proof of the equitable proceedings of that day; *God* (ſays he) *has appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteouſneſs, by that man whom he hath ordained.*

And then what more congruous than that the Son of God, who had taken ſo much pains for the ſalvation of men, and came into the world for that purpoſe, and had uſed all imaginable means for the reformation

formation of mankind; I say what more congruous, than that this very person should be honoured by God to sit in judgment upon the world, and to condemn those, who after all the means that had been tried for their recovery, would not repent and be saved? And what more proper, than that men, who are to be judged for *things done in the body*, should be judged in the body, and consequently that the resurrection of the dead should precede the general judgment?

And what more magnificent and suitable to this glorious solemnity, than the awful circumstances which the scripture mentions of the appearance of this great Judge; that he shall *descend from heaven* in great majesty and glory, attended with his mighty Angels; and that *every eye shall see him*; that upon his appearance the frame of nature shall be in an agony, and the whole world in flame and confusion; that those great and glorious bodies of light shall be obscured, and by degrees extinguished? *the sun shall be darkened, and the moon turned into blood, and all the powers of heaven shaken*; yea, *the heavens themselves shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements dissolve with fervent heat; the earth also, and all the works that are therein shall be burnt up.* I appeal to any man, whether this be not a representation of things very proper and suitable to that great day, wherein he who made the world shall come to judge it; and whether the wit of man ever devised any thing so awful, and so agreeable to the majesty of God, and the solemn judgment of the whole world? The description which Virgil makes of the judgment of another world, of the Elysian fields, and the infernal regions, how infinitely do they fall short of the majesty of the holy scripture, and the description there made of heaven and hell, and of *the great and terrible day of the Lord!* so that in comparison they are childish and trifling; and yet perhaps he had the most regular and most governed imagination of any man that ever lived, and observed the greatest decorum in his characters and descriptions. But who

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can declare *the great things of God*, but *he to whom God shall reveal them.*

Secondly, This expression of *the wrath of God* being *revealed from heaven*, doth not only imply the clear discovery of the thing, but likewise something extraordinary in the manner of the discovery. It is not only a natural impression upon the minds of men, that God will severely punish sinners; but he hath taken care that mankind should be instructed in this matter in a very particular and extraordinary manner. He hath not left it to the reason of men to collect it from the consideration of his attributes and perfections, his holiness and justice, and from the consideration of the promiscuous administration of his providence towards good and bad men in this world; but he hath been pleased to send an extraordinary person from heaven, on purpose to declare this thing plainly to the world: *The wrath of God is revealed from heaven*; that is, God sent *his own Son from heaven*, on purpose to declare his wrath against all obstinate and impenitent sinners, that he might effectually awaken the drowsy world to repentance; he hath sent an extraordinary ambassador into the world, to give warning to all those who continue in their sins, of the judgment of the great day, and to summon them before his dreadful tribunal. So the Apostle tells the Athenians, Acts xvii. 30. 31. *Now he commandeth all men every where to repent; because he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.*

Thirdly, This expression implies likewise the certainty of this discovery. If the wrath of God had only been declared in the discourses of wise men, though grounded upon very probable reason, yet it might have been brought into doubt by the contrary reasonings of subtle and disputing men: But to put the matter out of all question, we have a divine testimony for it, and God hath confirmed it from heaven, by signs, and wonders, and miracles, especially by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead;

dead; for by this *he hath given assurance unto all men*, that it is he who is ordained of God to *judge the quick and dead*.

Thus you see in what respect *the wrath of God* is said to be *revealed from heaven*, in that the gospel hath made a more clear, and particular, and certain discovery of the judgment of the great day, than ever was made to the world before. I proceed to the

Third observation, which I shall speak but briefly to; namely, that every wicked and vicious practice doth expose men to this dreadful danger. The Apostle instanceth in the two chief heads to which the sins of men may be reduced, *impiety towards God*, and *unrighteousness towards men*; and therefore he is to be understood to denounce the wrath of God against every particular kind of sin, comprehended under these general heads; so that no man that allows himself in any impiety and wickedness of life can hope to escape the wrath of God. Therefore it concerns us to be entirely religious, and to *have respect to all God's commandments*; and to take heed that we do not allow ourselves in the practice of any kind of sin whatsoever, because the living in any one known sin is enough to expose us to the dreadful wrath of God. Though a man be just and righteous in his dealings with men, yet if he neglect the worship and service of God, this will certainly bring him under condemnation; and on the other hand, though a man may serve God never so diligently and devoutly, yet if he be defective in righteousness toward men, if he deal falsly and fraudulently with his neighbour, he shall not escape the wrath of God. Though a man pretend to never so much piety and devotion, yet if he be *unrighteous, he shall not inherit the kingdom of God*. If any man over-reach and *defraud his brother in any matter, the Lord is the avenger of such*, saith St. Paul, 1 Thess. iv. 6.

So that here is a very powerful argument to take men off from all sin, and to engage them to a constant and careful discharge of their whole duty toward

ward God and men, and to reform whatever is amiſs either in the frame and temper of their minds, or in the actions and courſe of their lives; becauſe any kind of wickedneſs, any one ſort of vicious courſe, lays men open to the vengeance of God, and the puniſhments of another world; *the wrath of God is revealed from heaven againſt all ungodlineſs, and unrighteouſneſs of men*; there is no exception in the caſe, we muſt forſake all ſin, ſubdue every luſt, *be holy in all manner of converſation*, otherwiſe we can have no reaſonable hopes of eſcaping the wrath of God, and the damnation of hell. But to proceed to the

Fourth obſervation; namely, that it is a very great aggravation of ſin, for men to offend againſt the light of their own minds. The Apoſtle here aggravates the wickedneſs of the heathen world, that they did not live up to that knowledge which they had of God, but contradicted it in their lives, *holding the truth of God in unrighteouſneſs*. And that he ſpeaks here of the heathen, is plain from his following diſcourſe, and the character he gives of thoſe perſons of whom he was ſpeaking, *who held the truth of God in unrighteouſneſs; becauſe that which may be known of God is manifeſt in them, for God hath ſhewed it unto them*; and this he proves, becauſe thoſe who were deſtitute of divine revelation, were not without all knowledge of God, being led by the ſight of this viſible world, to the knowledge of an inviſible Being and Power that was the author of it, ver. 20, 21. *For the inviſible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly ſeen, being underſtood by the things which are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, ſo that they are without excuſe; becauſe that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God:* (*Hoc eſt ſummum delicti, nolle agnoſcere, quem ignorare non poſſis*, ſaith Tertullian to the heathen; "This is the height of thy fault, not to acknow-"ledge him, whom thou canſt not but know, not "to own him, of whom thou canſt not be igno-"rant, if thou wouldeſt;") *neither were thankful*; they did not pay thoſe acknowledgments to him which of right were due to the author of their being.

ing, and of all good things; *but became vain in their imaginations*; ἐματαιώθησαν ἐν τοῖς διαλογισμοῖς αὐτῶν, *they were fooled with their own reasonings.* This he speaks of the Philosophers who in those great arguments of the being and providence of God, the immortality of the soul, and the rewards of another world, had lost the truth by too much subtility about it, and had disputed themselves into doubt and uncertainty about those things which were naturally known; *nimium altercando veritas amittitur*; "Truth is many times lost by too much contention and dispute about it, and by too eager a "pursuit of it, men many times out-run it, and leave "it behind;" ver. 22. *and professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.* Men never play the fools more, than by endeavouring to be over-subtle and wise; ver. 23. *and changed the glory of the incorruptible God, into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and to four-footed beasts, and creeping things*; here he speaks of the sottishness of their idolatry, whereby they provoked God to give them up to all manner of lewdness and impurity; ver. 24. *wherefore God also gave them up unto uncleanness, through the lusts of their own hearts*; and again, ver. 26. *for this cause God gave them up to vile affections*; and then he enumerates the abominable lusts and vices they were guilty of, notwithstanding their natural acknowledgment of the divine justice, ver. 32. *who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.* By all which it appears that he speaks of the Heathen, who offended against the natural light of their own minds, and therefore were *without excuse. Quam sibi veniam spegere possunt impietatis suæ, qui non agnoscunt cultum ejus, quam proclivis ignorari ab hominibus fas non est?* saith Lactantius, "How can they hope for pardon for their impie-"ty, who deny to worship that God of whom it "is not possible mankind should be wholly igno-"rant?"

So

So that this is to *hold the truth in unrighteousness*, injuriously to suppress it, and to hinder the power and efficacy of it upon our minds and actions; for so the word κατέχειν sometimes signifies, as well as *to hold fast*; and this every man does, who acts contrary to what he believes and knows; he offers violence to the light of his own mind, and does injury to the truth, and keeps that a prisoner, which would set him free; *ye shall know the truth*, (says our Lord) *and the truth shall make you free*.

And this is one of the highest aggravations of the sins of men, to offend against knowledge, and that light which God hath set up in every man's mind. If men wander and stumble in the dark, it is not to be wondered at; many times it is unavoidable, and no care can prevent it: But in the light it is expected that men should look before them, and discern their way. That natural light which the Heathen had, though it was but comparatively dim and imperfect, yet the Apostle takes notice of it as a great aggravation of their idolatrous and abominable practices. Those natural notions which all men have of God, if they had in any measure attended to them, and governed themselves by them, might have been sufficient to have preserved them from dishonouring the Deity, by worshipping creatures instead of God: the common light of nature was enough to have discovered to them the evil of those lewd and unnatural practices, which many of them were guilty of; but they detained and suppressed the truth most injuriously, and would not suffer it to have its natural and proper influence upon them. And this is that which left them without excuse, that from the light of nature they had knowledge enough to have done better, and to have preserved them from those great crimes which were so common among them.

And if this was so great an aggravation of the impiety and wickedness of the Heathen, and left them without excuse, what apology can be made for the impiety and unrighteousness of Christians, who have so strong and clear a light to discover to them their duty, and the danger of neglecting it; to whom *the wrath*

wrath of God is plainly *revealed from heaven againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of men?* The truths of the goſpel are ſo very clear and powerful, and ſuch an improvement of natural light, that men muſt uſe great force and violence to ſuppreſs them, and to hinder the efficacy of them upon their lives. And this is a certain rule, by how much the greater our knowledge, by ſo much the leſs is our excuſe, and ſo much the greater puniſhment is due to our faults. So our Lord hath told us, Luke xii. 47. *That ſervant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himſelf, neither did according to his will, ſhall be beaten with many ſtripes.* And John ix. 41. *If ye were blind,* (ſays our Saviour to the Jews) *ye ſhould have no ſin.* So much ignorance as there is of our duty, ſo much abatement of the wilfulneſs of our faults; but *if we ſin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more ſacrifice for ſin, but a fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation,* ſays the Apoſtle to the Hebrews, chap. x. 26. 27. *If we ſin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth;* implying that men cannot pretend ignorance for their faults, after ſo clear a revelation of the will of God, as is made to mankind by the goſpel.

And upon this conſideration it is, that our Saviour doth ſo aggravate the impenitency and unbelief of the Jews, becauſe it was in oppoſition to all the advantages of knowledge, which can be imagined to be afforded to mankind, John xv. 22. 23. 24. *If I had not come and ſpoken unto them, they had not had ſin;* that is, in compariſon their ſin had been much more excuſable; *but now they have no cloak for their ſin. He that hateth me, hateth my Father alſo. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had ſin; but now have they both ſeen and hated both me and my Father.* How is that? Our Saviour means, that they had now ſinned againſt all the advantages of knowing the will of God, that mankind could poſſibly have: At once oppoſing natural light, which was the diſpenſation of the Father; and the cleareſt revelation of God's

will, in the diſpenſation of the goſpel by his Son; *now have they both ſeen and hated both me and my father.*

The two remaining obſervations I ſhall reſerve to another opportunity.

SERMON CXII.

The danger of all known ſin, both from the light of nature and revelation.

ROM. i. 18, 19.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of men, who hold the truth in unrighteouſneſs; becauſe that which may be known of God is manifeſt in them, for God hath ſhewed it unto them.

The ſecond ſermon on this text.

I Have handled four of the obſervations which I raiſed from theſe words, and ſhall now proceed to the other two that remain.

The fifth obſervation was, that the natural knowledge which men have of God, if they live contrary to it, is a ſufficient evidence of their *holding the truth of God in unrighteouſneſs.* For the reaſon why the Apoſtle chargeth them with this, is, *becauſe that which may be known of God is manifeſt, in that God hath ſhewed it unto them.*

There is a natural knowledge of God, and of the duty we owe to him, which the Apoſtle calls τὸ γνωστὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ, *that of God which is obvious to be known* by the light of nature, and is as much as is abſolutely neceſſary for us to know. There is ſomething of God that is incomprehenſible, and beyond the reach of our underſtandings; but his being and eſſential perfections may be known, which he calls his *eternal power and godhead*; theſe he tells us *are clear-*

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by ſeen, being underſtood by the things which are made; that is, the creation of the world is a plain demonſtration to men, of the being and power of God; and if ſo, then *God is naturally known to men*; the contrary whereof Socinus poſitively maintains, tho' therein he be forſaken by moſt of his followers; an opinion in my judgment, very unworthy of one, who not without reaſon, was eſteemed ſo great a maſter of reaſon; and (though I believe he did not ſee it) undermining the ſtrongeſt and ſureſt foundation of all religion, which, when the natural notions of God are once taken away, will certainly want its beſt ſupport. Beſides that by denying any natural knowledge of God, and his eſſential perfections, he freely gives away one of the moſt plauſible grounds of oppoſing the doctrine of the Trinity. But becauſe this is a matter of great conſequence, and he was a great man, and is not to be confuted by contempt, but by better reaſon, if it can be found; I will conſider his reaſons for this opinion, and return a particular anſwer to them.

Firſt, He ſays that if the knowledge of God were natural, it would not be of faith; but the Apoſtle ſays, that *we muſt believe that he is*. The force of which argument, if it have any, lies in this, that the object of faith is divine revelation, and therefore we cannot be ſaid to believe what we naturally know. The ſchoolmen indeed ſay ſo; but the ſcripture uſeth the word *faith* more largely, for a real perſuaſion of any thing, whether grounded upon ſenſe, or reaſon, or divine revelation. And our Saviour's ſpeech to Thomas, *Becauſe thou haſt ſeen, thou haſt believed*, does ſufficiently intimate, that a man may believe what he ſees; and if ſo, what ſhould hinder, but that a man may be ſaid to believe what he naturally knows; that is, be really perſuaded that there is a God from natural light?

Secondly, His next argument is, becauſe the ſame Apoſtle concludes Enoch to have believed God, becauſe he pleaſed God, *and without faith it is impoſſible to pleaſe him*: From whence he ſays, it is certain that men may be without this belief, which

if it be natural they cannot. Indeed if the Apoſtle had ſaid, that whoever believes a God, muſt of neceſſity obey and pleaſe him, then the inference had been good, that all men do not naturally believe a God, becauſe it is certain they do not pleaſe him: But it is not good the other way, no more than if a man ſhould argue thus, that becauſe whoever acts reaſonably, muſt be endowed with reaſon, therefore men are not naturally endowed with reaſon. For as men may naturally be endowed with reaſon, and yet not always make uſe of it; ſo men may naturally know and believe a God, and yet not be careful to pleaſe him.

His third argument is, that the ſcripture ſays, that there are ſome that do not believe a God, for which he cites that of David, *The fool hath ſaid in his heart, there is no God*; which certainly proves that bad men live ſo, as if they believed there were no God; nay, it may farther import, that they endeavour as much as they can, to ſtifle and extinguiſh the belief of a God in their minds, and would gladly perſuade themſelves there is no God, becauſe it is convenient for them there ſhould be none; and whether David meant ſo or not, it is very probable that ſome may arrive to that height of impiety, as for a time at leaſt, and in ſome moods, to disbelieve a God, and to be very confident of the arguments on that ſide. But what then? Is the knowledge and belief of a God therefore not natural to mankind? Nature itſelf, as conſtant and uniform as it is, admits of ſome irregularities and exceptions, in effects that are merely natural, much more in thoſe which have ſomething in them that is voluntary, and depends upon the good or bad uſe of our reaſon and underſtanding; and there is no arguing from what is monſtrous, againſt what is natural. It is natural for men to have five fingers upon a hand, and yet ſome are born otherwiſe: but in voluntary agents, that which is natural may be perverted, and in a great meaſure extinguiſhed in ſome particular inſtances; ſo that there is no force at all in this objection.

His fourth and laſt argument is, that there have not

not only been particular perſons, but whole nations who have had no ſenſe, nor ſo much as ſuſpicion of a Deity. This I confeſs were of great force, if it were true; and for the proof of this, he produceth the inſtance of Braſil in America. But I utterly deny the matter of fact and hiſtory, and challenge any man to bring good teſtimony, not only of any nation, but of any city in the world, that ever were profeſſed Atheiſts.

I know this was affirmed of ſome part of Braſil, by ſome of the firſt diſcoverers, who yet at the ſame time owned, that theſe very people did moſt expreſly believe the immortality of the ſoul, and the rewards and puniſhments of another life; opinions which no man can well reconcile with the denial and diſbelief of a Deity. But to put an end to this argument, later and more perfect diſcoveries have found this not to be true, and do aſſure us upon better acquaintance with thoſe barbarous people, that they are deeply poſſeſſed with the belief of *one ſupreme God, who made and governs the world.*

Having thus given a particular anſwer to Socinus his arguments againſt the natural knowledge of a God, I will now briefly offer ſome arguments for it. And to prove that the knowledge and belief of a God is natural to mankind, my

Firſt argument ſhall be from the univerſal conſent, in this matter, of all nations in all ages. And this is an argument of great force, there being no better way to prove any thing to be natural to any kind of being, than if it be generally found in the whole kind. *Omnium conſenſus natura vox eſt,* "the "conſent of all is the voice of nature," ſaith Tully." And indeed by what other argument can we prove that reaſon, and ſpeech, and an inclination to ſociety are natural to men; but that theſe belong to the whole kind?

Secondly, Unleſs the knowledge of God and his eſſential perfections be natural, I do not ſee what ſufficient and certain foundation there can be of revealed religion. For unleſs we naturally know God to be a being of all perfection, and conſequently

that whatever he ſays is true, I cannot ſee what divine revelation can ſignify. For God's revealing or declaring ſuch a thing to us, is no neceſſary argument that it is ſo, unleſs antecedently to this revelation we be poſſeſſed firmly with this principle, that whatever God ſays is true. And whatever is known antecedently to revelation, muſt be known by natural light, and by reaſonings and deductions from natural principles. I might further add to this argument, that the only ſtandard and meaſure to judge of divine revelations, and to diſtinguiſh between what are true, and what are counterfeit, are the natural notions which men have of God, and of his eſſential perfections.

Thirdly, If the notion of a God be not natural, I do not ſee how men can have any natural notion of the difference of moral good and evil, juſt and unjuſt. For if I do not naturally know there is a God, how can I naturally know that there is any law obliging to the one, and forbidding the other? all law and obligation to obedience, neceſſarily ſuppoſing the authority of a ſuperior Being. But the Apoſtle expreſly aſſerts, that the Gentiles who were deſtitute of a revealed law, *were a law unto themſelves*; but there cannot be a natural law obliging mankind, unleſs God be naturally known to them.

And this Socinus himſelf, in his diſcourſe upon this very argument, is forced to acknowledge. "In "all men (ſays he) there is naturally a difference "of juſt and unjuſt, or at leaſt there is planted "in all men an acknowledgment that juſt ought "to be preferred before unjuſt, and that which is "honeſt, before the contrary; and this is nothing "elſe but the word of God within a man, which "whoſoever obeys, in ſo doing obeys God, though "otherwiſe he neither know nor think there is a God; "and there is no doubt but he that thus obeys God, "is accepted of him." So that here is an acknowledgment of a natural obligation to a law, without any natural knowledge of a ſuperior authority; which I think cannot be; and which is worſe, that a man may obey God acceptably, without knowing and believing

lieving there is a God; which directly thwarts the ground of his first argument, from those words of the Apostle, *without faith it is impossible to please God; for he that cometh to God*, that is, he that will be religious and please God, *must believe that he is*: so hard is it for any man to contradict nature, without contradicting himself.

Fourthly, My last argument I ground upon the words of the Apostle in my text, *that which may be known of God, is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. Is manifest in them, is evident among them.* God hath sufficiently manifested it to mankind. And which way hath God done this? by revelation? or by the natural light of reason? He tells us at the 20th verse, *For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen*, that is, God, who in himself is invisible, ever since he hath created the world, hath given a visible demonstration of himself, that is, of *his eternal power and Godhead, being understood by the things which are made.* The plain sense of the whole is, that this wise and wonderful frame of the world, which cannot reasonably be ascribed to any other cause but God, is a sensible demonstration to all mankind, of an eternal and powerful Being that was the author and framer of it. The only question now is, whether this text speaks of the knowledge of God by particular revelation, or by natural light and reason, from the contemplation of the works of God? Socinus having no other way to avoid the force of this text, will needs understand it of the knowledge of God by the revelation of the gospel. His words are these: "The Apostle therefore says in this place, "that the eternal Godhead of God, that is, that "which God would always have us to do, (for the "Godhead is sometimes taken in this sense) and his "eternal power, that is, his promise which never "fails, (in which sense he said a little before, that the "gospel is the power of God) these, I say, which were "never seen by men, that is, were never known to "them since the creation of the world, are known "by his works, that is, by the wonderful operati-

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" on of God, and divine men, especially of Christ " and his Apostles." These are his very words, and now I refer it to any indifferent judgment, whether this be not a very forced and constrained interpretation of this text; and whether that which I have before given, be not infinitely more free and natural, and every way more agreeable to the obvious sense of the words, and the scope of the Apostle's argument. For he plainly speaks of the heathen, and proves them to be inexcusable, because *they held the truth in unrighteousness*, and having a natural knowledge of God, from the contemplation of his works, and the things which are made, *they did not glorify him as God*. And therefore I shall not trouble myself to give any other answer to it; for by the absurd violence of it in every part, it confutes itself more effectually than any discourse about it can do.

I have been the larger upon this, because it is a matter of so great consequence, and lies at the bottom of all religion. For the natural knowledge which men have of God, is, when all is done, the surest and fastest hold that religion hath on human nature. Besides, how should God judge that part of the world who are wholly destitute of divine revelation, if they had no natural knowledge of him, and consequently could not be under the direction and government of any law? For *where there is no law there is no transgression*; and where men are guilty of the breach of no law, they cannot be judged and condemned for it; for *the judgment of God is according to truth*.

And now this being established, that men have a natural knowledge of God; if they contradict it by their life and practice, they are guilty of *detaining the truth of God in unrighteousness*; for by this argument the Apostle proves the heathen to be guilty of *holding the truth in unrighteousness*; because notwithstanding the natural knowledge which they had of God *by the things which are made*, they lived in the practice of grosse idolatry, and the most abominable sins and vices.

And this concerns us much more, who have the glorious light of the gospel added to the light of nature. For if they who offended against the light of

nature, were liable to the judgment of God, of how much ſorer puniſhment ſhall we be thought worthy, if we neglect thoſe infinite advantages which the revelation of the goſpel hath ſuperadded to natural light? He hath now ſet our duty in the cleareſt and ſtrongeſt light that ever was afforded to mankind; ſo that if we will not now believe and repent, there is no remedy for us, but we muſt *dy in our ſins*; *if we ſin wilfully, after* ſo much *knowledge of the truth, there remains no more ſacrifice for ſin, but a fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation to conſume us.*

The ſum of what hath been ſaid on this argument is briefly this; that men have a natural knowledge of God, and of thoſe great duties which reſult from the knowledge of him; ſo that whatever men ſay and pretend, as to the main things of religion, the worſhip of God, and juſtice and righteouſneſs towards men, ſetting aſide divine revelation, we are all naturally convinced of our duty, and of what we ought to do, and thoſe who live in a bad courſe, need only be put in mind of what they naturally know, better than any body elſe can tell them, that they are in a bad courſe: ſo that I may appeal to all wicked men, from themſelves raſh and heated, and intoxicated with pleaſure and vanity, tranſported and hurried away by luſt and paſſion; to themſelves ſerious and compoſed, and in a cool and conſiderate temper. And can any ſober man forbear to follow the convictions of his own mind, and to reſolve to do what he inwardly conſents to as beſt? Let us but be true to ourſelves, and obey the dictates of our own minds, and give leave to our own conſcience to counſel us and tell us what we ought to do, and we ſhall be *a law to ourſelves*. I proceed to the

Sixth and laſt obſervation, namely, that the clear revelation of the wrath of God in the goſpel, againſt the impiety and unrighteouſneſs of men, is one principal thing, which renders it ſo very powerful and likely a means for the ſalvation of mankind. For the Apoſtle inſtanceth in two things, which give the goſpel ſo great an advantage to this purpoſe, the mer-

mercy of God to penitent sinners, and his severity towards the impenitent; both which are so fully and clearly revealed in the gospel. *The gospel is the power of God to salvation, to every one that believeth, because therein the righteousness of God is revealed*; that is, his great grace and mercy in the justification and pardon of sinners by Jesus Christ, which I have already shewn to be meant by *the righteousness of God*, by comparing this with the explication which is given of the *righteousness of God*, chap. iii. ver. 22.

The other reason which he gives of the gospel's being *the power of God to salvation*, is the plain declaration of the severity of God toward impenitent sinners, *because therein also the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men*. The force of which argument will appear, if we consider these following particulars:

First, That the declarations of the gospel in this matter are so plain and express.

Secondly, That they are very dreadful and terrible.

Thirdly, That there is no safety or hope of impunity for men that go on and continue in their sins.

Fourthly, That this argument will take hold of the most desperate and profligate sinners, and still retain its force upon the minds of men, when all other considerations fail, and are of little or no efficacy. And,

Fifthly, That no religion in the world can urge this argument with that force and advantage that Christianity does.

First, That the declarations of the gospel in this matter are most plain and express, and that not only against sin and wickedness in general, but against particular sins and vices, so that no man that lives in any evil and vicious course, can be ignorant of his danger. Our Lord hath told us in general, what shall be the doom of the workers of iniquity, yea, though they may have owned him, and made profession of his name, Matth. vii. 21. *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doth the will of my Father*

ther which is in heaven. Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, &c. then will I profess unto them, I never knew you. Depart from me ye that work iniquity. Matth. xiii. 49, 50. *So shall it be at the end of the world, the Angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.* Matth. xxv. 46. *The wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal,* John v. 28, 29. *The hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.* Rom. ii. 6. St. Paul tells us that there *is a day of wrath, and of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds; to them who obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doth evil.* 2 Thess. i. 7, 8, 9. that *the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty Angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.* Nothing can be more plain and express than these general declarations of the wrath of God against sinners; that there is a day of judgment appointed, and a judge constituted to take cognizance of the actions of men, to pass a severe sentence, and to inflict a terrible punishment upon the workers of iniquity.

More particularly our Lord and his Apostles have denounced the wrath of God against particular sins and vices. In several places of the New Testament, there are catalogues given of particular sins, the practice whereof will certainly shut men out of the kingdom of heaven, and expose them to the wrath and vengeance of God, 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10. *Know ye not, that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived, neither fornicators nor idolaters,*

liars, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abuſers of themſelves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, ſhall inherit the kingdom of God. So likewiſe, Gal. v. 19, 20, 21. *The works of the fleſh are manifeſt, which are theſe, adultery, fornication, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, ſtrife, ſeditions, hereſies, envyings, murthers, drunkenneſs, revellings, and ſuch like: of the which I tell you before, as I have alſo told you in times paſt, that they that do ſuch things ſhall not inherit the kingdom of God.* Col. iii. 5, 6. *Mortify therefore your members upon earth, fornication, uncleanneſs, inordinate affection, evil concupiſcence, and covetouſneſs, which is idolatry, for which things ſake the wrath of God cometh on the children of diſobedience.* Rev. xxi. 8. *The fearful and unbelieving,* (that is, thoſe who rejected the Chriſtian religion notwithſtanding the clear evidence that was offered for it, and thoſe who out of fear ſhould apoſtatize from it) *the fearful and unbelieving, and the abominable,* (that is, thoſe who were guilty of unnatural luſts, not fit to be named) *and murderers, and whoremongers, and ſorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars,* (that is, all ſorts of falſe and and deceitful and perfidious perſons) *ſhall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimſtone: which is the ſecond death.*

And not only theſe groſs and notorious ſins, which are ſuch plain violations of the law and light of nature; but thoſe wherein mankind have been apt to take more liberty, as if they were not ſufficiently convinced of the evil of them; as the reſiſting of civil authority, which the Apoſtle tells us, they that are guilty of, *ſhall receive to themſelves damnation;* Rom. xiii. 2. Profane ſwearing in common converſation, which St. James tells us brings men under the danger of damnation, chap. v. 12. *Above all things, my brethren, ſwear not, leſt ye fall under condemnation.* Nay our Saviour hath told us plainly, that not only for wicked actions, but for every evil and ſinful word, men are obnoxious to the judgment of God. So our Lord aſſures us, Matth. xii. 36, 37. *I ſay unto you, that*

that every idle word that men ſhall ſpeak, they ſhall give an account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou ſhalt be juſtified, and by thy words thou ſhalt be condemned. He had ſpoken before of that great and unpardonable ſin of *blaſpheming the Holy Ghoſt*; and becauſe this might be thought great ſeverity for evil words, he declares the reaſon more fully, becauſe words ſhew the mind and temper of the man, ver. 34. *For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth ſpeaketh.* "The character of the "man, is ſhewn by his words," ſaith *Menander. Profert enim mores plerumque oratio* (ſaith *Quinctilian*) *& animi ſecreta detegit*; "A man's ſpeech diſ-"covers his manners, and the ſecrets of his heart; *ut vivit etiam quemque dicere*, Men commonly ſpeak as they live; and therefore our Saviour adds, *A good man out of the good treaſure of his heart, bringeth forth good things; and an evil man, out of the evil treaſure of his heart bringeth forth evil things: but I ſay unto you, that every idle word,* πᾶν ῥῆμα ἀργὸν, by which I do not think our Saviour means, that men ſhall be called to a ſolemn account at the day of judgment, for every trifling, and impatient, and unprofitable word, but every wicked and ſinful word of any kind: as if he had ſaid, Do you think this ſevere, to make words an unpardonable fault? I ſay unto you, that men ſhall not only be condemned for their malicious and blaſphemous ſpeeches againſt the Holy Ghoſt; but they ſhall likewiſe give a ſtrict account for all other wicked and ſinful ſpeeches in any kind, though much inferior to this. And this is not only moſt agreeable to the ſcope of our Saviour, but is confirmed by ſome Greek copies, in which it is πᾶν ὄνομα πονηρὸν, *every wicked word which men ſhall ſpeak, they ſhall be accountable for it at the day of judgment.* But this by the by.

Our Saviour likewiſe tells us, that men ſhall not only be proceeded againſt for ſins of commiſſion, but for the bare omiſſion and neglect of their duty, eſpecially in works of mercy and charity; for *not feeding the hungry*, and the like, as we ſee, Matth. xxv. and that for the omiſſion of theſe, he will paſs

that terrible ſentence, *Depart ye curſed*, &c. So that it nearly concerns us to be careful of our whole life, of all our words and actions, ſince the goſpel hath ſo plainly and expreſly declared, that *for all theſe things God will bring us into judgment.* And if the threatenings of the goſpel be true, *what manner of perſons ought we to be, in all holy converſation and godlineſs?*

Secondly, As the threatenings of the goſpel are very plain and expreſs, ſo are they likewiſe very dreadful and terrible. I want words to expreſs the leaſt part of the terror of them; and yet the expreſſions of ſcripture concerning the miſery and puniſhment of ſinners in another world, are ſuch as may juſtly raiſe amazement and horror in thoſe that hear them. Sometimes it is expreſſed by a *departing from God*, and a perpetual baniſhment *from his preſence*, who is the fountain of all comfort and joy, and happineſs; ſometimes by the loſs of our ſouls, or ourſelves. *What ſhall it profit a man to gain the whole word, and loſe his own ſoul?* or, (as it is in another evangeliſt) *to loſe himſelf?* Not that our being ſhall be deſtroyed; that would be a happy loſs indeed, to him that is ſentenced to be for ever miſerable; but the man ſhall ſtill remain, and his body and ſoul continue to be the foundation of his miſery, and a ſcene of perpetual woe and diſcontent, which our Saviour calls the *deſtroying of body and ſoul in hell*, or *going into everlaſting puniſhment, where there ſhall be wailing and gnaſhing of teeth, where the worm dies not, and the fire is not quenched.* Could I repreſent to you the horror of that diſmal priſon, into which wicked and impure ſouls are to be thruſt, and the miſery they muſt there endure, without the leaſt ſpark of comfort, or glimmering of hope, how they wail and groan under the intolerable wrath of God, the inſolent ſcorn and cruelty of devils, the ſevere laſhes and ſtings, the raging anguiſh and horrible deſpair of their own minds, without intermiſſion, without pity, and without hope of ever ſeeing an end of that miſery, which yet is inſupportable for one moment; could I repreſent theſe things to you according to

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the terror of them, what effect muſt they have upon us? and with what patience could any man bear to think of plunging himſelf into this miſery? and by his own wilful fault and folly to endanger his coming into this place and ſtate of torments? eſpecially if we conſider, in the

Third place, that the goſpel hath likewiſe declared, that there is no avoiding of this miſery, no hopes of impunity, if men go on and continue in their ſins. The terms of the goſpel in this are peremptory, that *except we repent, we ſhall periſh*; that *without holineſs no man ſhall ſee the Lord*; that *the unrighteous ſhall not inherit the kingdom of God.* And this is a very preſſing conſideration, and brings the matter to a ſhort and plain iſſue. Either we muſt leave our ſins, or dy in them; either we muſt repent of them, or be judged for them; either we muſt forſake our ſins, and break off that wicked courſe which we have lived in, or we muſt quit all hopes of heaven and happineſs, nay, we cannot *eſcape the damnation of hell.* The clear revelation of a future judgment is ſo preſſing an argument to repentance, as no man can in reaſon reſiſt, that hath not a mind to be miſerable. *Now* (ſaith St. Paul to the Athenians) *he ſtraightly chargeth all men every where to repent, becauſe he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteouſneſs.*

Men may cheat themſelves or ſuffer themſelves to be deluded by others, about ſeveral means and devices of reconciling a wicked life, with the hopes of heaven and eternal ſalvation; as by mingling ſome pangs of ſorrow for ſin, and ſome hot fits of devotion with a ſinful life; which is only the interruption of a wicked courſe, without reformation and amendment of life: but, *let no man deceive you with vain words*, for our bleſſed Saviour hath provided no other ways to ſave men, but upon the terms of repentance and obedience.

Fourthly, This argument takes hold of the moſt deſperate and profligate ſinners, and ſtill retains its force upon the minds of men, when almoſt all other conſiderations fail, and have loſt their efficacy upon

us. Many men are gone ſo far in an evil courſe, that neither ſhame of their vices, nor the love of God and virtue, nor the hopes of heaven are of any force with them, to reclaim them, and bring them to a better mind: But there is one handle yet left, whereby to lay hold of them, and that is their fear. This is a paſſion that lies deep in our nature, being founded in ſelf-preſervation, and ſticks ſo cloſely to us, that we cannot quit ourſelves of it, nor ſhake it off. Men may put off ingenuity, and break through all obligations of gratitude. Men may harden their foreheads, and conquer all ſenſe of ſhame; but they can never perfectly ſtifle and ſubdue their fears; they can hardly ſo extinguiſh the fear of hell, but that ſome ſparks of that fire will ever and anon be flying about in their conſciences, eſpecially when they are made ſober, and brought to themſelves by affliction, and by the preſent apprehenſions of death have a nearer ſight of another world. And if it was ſo hard for the Heathen to conquer theſe apprehenſions, how much harder muſt it be to Chriſtians, who have ſo much greater aſſurance of theſe things, and to whom *the wrath of God is* ſo clearly *revealed from heaven, againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of men?*

Fifthly, No religion in the world ever urged this argument upon men, with that force and advantage which Chriſtianity does. The philoſophy of the Heathen gave men no ſteady aſſurance of the thing; the moſt knowing perſons among them were not agreed about a future ſtate; the greateſt part of them ſpake but doubtfully concerning another life. And beſides the natural jealouſies and ſuſpicions of mankind concerning theſe things, they had only ſome fair probabilities of reaſon, and the authority of their Poets, who talkt they knew not what about the Elyſian fields, and the infernal regions, and the three judges of hell; ſo that the wiſeſt among them had hardly aſſurance enough in themſelves of the truth of the thing, to preſs it upon others with any great confidence, and therefore it was not likely to have any great efficacy upon the generality of mankind.

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As for the Jewish religion; though that supposed and took for granted the rewards of another world, as a principle of natural religion; yet in the law of Moses there was no particular and express revelation of the life of the world to come; and what was deduced from it, was by remote and obscure consequence. Temporal promises and threatenings it had many and clear, and their eyes were so dazzled with these, that it is probable that the generality of them did but little consider a future state, till they fell into great temporal calamities under the Grecian and Roman empires, whereby they were almost necessarily awakened to the consideration and hopes of a better life, to relieve them under their present evils and sufferings; and yet even in that time they were divided into two great factions about this matter, the one affirming, and the other as confidently denying any life after this. *But the gospel hath brought life and immortality to light*, as we are assured from heaven of the truth and reality of another state, and a future judgment. The Son of God was sent into the world to preach this doctrine, and rose again from the dead, and was taken up into heaven, for a visible demonstration to all mankind of another life after this, and consequently of a future judgment, which no man ever doubted of, that did firmly believe a future state.

The sum of all that I have said is this; the gospel hath plainly declared to us, that the only way to salvation is by forsaking our sins, and living a holy and virtuous life; and the most effectual argument in the world to persuade men to this, is the consideration of the infinite danger that a sinful course exposeth men to, since the wrath of God continually hangs over sinners, and if they continue in their sins, will certainly fall upon them, and overwhelm them with misery, and he that is not moved by this argument, is lost to all intents and purposes.

All that now remains is, to urge this argument upon men, and from the serious consideration of it, to persuade them to repent, and reform their wicked lives. And was there ever age wherein this was

more needful? when iniquity doth not only abound, but even rage among us; when infidelity and profaneneſs, and all manner of lewdneſs and vice, appears ſo boldly and openly, and men commit the greateſt abominations without bluſhing at them; when vice hath got ſuch head, that it can hardly bear to be checked and controlled, and when, as the Roman hiſtorian complains of his times, *ad ea tempora, quibus nec vitia noſtra, nec remedia, pati poſſumus, perventum eſt*; "things are come to that paſs, that "we can neither bear our vices, nor the remedies "of them?" Our vices are grown to a prodigious and intolerable height, and yet men hardly have the patience to hear of them; and ſurely a diſeaſe is then dangerous indeed, when it cannot bear the ſeverity that is neceſſary to a cure. But yet, notwithſtanding this, we who are the meſſengers of God to men, to warn them of their ſin and danger, muſt not keep ſilence, and ſpare to tell them both of their ſins, and of the judgment of God which hangs over them; that *God will viſit for theſe things*, and that *his ſoul will be avenged on ſuch a nation as this*. At leaſt we may have leave to warn others, who are not yet *run to the ſame exceſs of riot, to ſave themſelves from this untoward generation*. God's judgments are abroad in the earth, and call aloud upon us to *learn righteouſneſs*.

But this is but a ſmall conſideration, in compariſon of the judgment of another world, which we who call ourſelves Chriſtians do profeſs to believe, as one of the chief articles of our faith. The conſideration of this ſhould check and cool us in the heat of all our ſinful pleaſures; and that bitter irony of Solomon ſhould cut us to the heart, *Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart chear thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the ſight of thine eyes; but know that for all theſe things God will bring thee into judgment*. Think often and ſeriouſly on that time, wherein the wrath of God, which is now revealed againſt ſin, ſhall be executed upon ſinners; and if we believe this, we are ſtrangely ſtupid and obſtinate, if we be not moved

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by it. The assurance of this made St. Paul extremely importunate in exhorting men to avoid so great danger, 2 Cor. v. 10. 11. *We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or evil. Knowing therefore the terrors of the Lord, we persuade men.* And if this ought to move us to take so great a care of others, much more of ourselves. The judgment to come is a very amazing consideration, it is a fearful thing to hear of it, but it will be much more terrible to see it, especially to those whose guilt must needs make them so heartily concerned in the dismal consequences of it; and yet as sure as I stand, and you sit here, *this great and terrible day of the Lord will come,* and *who may abide his coming!* what will we do, when that day shall surprize us careless and unprepared! what unspeakable horror and amazement will then take hold of us! when lifting up our eyes to heaven, we *shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of* it, *with power and great glory*; when that powerful voice, which shall pierce the ears of the dead, shall ring through the world, *Arise ye dead, and come to judgment!* when the mighty trumpet shall sound, and wake the sleepers of a thousand years, and summon the dispersed parts of the bodies of all men that ever lived, to rally together and take their place; and the souls and bodies of men which have been so long strangers to one another, shall meet and be united again, to receive the doom due to their deeds; what fear shall then surprize sinners, and how will they tremble at the presence of the great Judge, and *for the glory of his Majesty!* how will their consciences fly in their faces, and their own hearts condemn them, for their wicked and ungodly lives, and even prevent that sentence which yet shall certainly be passed and executed upon them! But I will proceed no farther in this argument, which hath so much of terror in it.

I will conclude my sermon, as Solomon doth his Ecclesiastes, chap. xii. 13, 14. *Let us hear the conclusion*

cluſion of the whole matter; fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man; for God ſhall bring every work into judgment, and every ſecret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. To which I will only add that ſerious and merciful admonition of *a greater than Solomon*, I mean the great Judge of the whole world, our bleſſed Lord and Saviour, Luke xxi. 34, 35, 36. *Take heed to yourſelves, leſt at any time your hearts be overcharged with ſurfeiting, and drunkenneſs, and the cares of this life, and ſo that day come upon you at unawares. For as a ſnare ſhall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to eſcape all theſe things that ſhall come to paſs, and to ſtand before the Son of man:* To whom with the Father, and the Holy Ghoſt, &c.

SERMON CXIII.

Knowledge and practice neceſſary in religion.

JOHN xiii. 17.

If ye know theſe things, happy are ye if ye do them.

TWO things make up religion, the knowledge and practice of it; and the firſt is wholly in order to the ſecond; and God hath not revealed to us the knowledge of himſelf and his will, merely for the improvement of our underſtanding, but for the bettering of our hearts and lives; not to entertain our minds with the ſpeculations of religion and virtue, but to form and govern our actions. *If ye know theſe things, happy are ye if ye do them.*

In which words our bleſſed Saviour does from a particular inſtance, take occaſion to ſettle a general concluſion; namely, that religion doth mainly conſiſt

ſiſt in practice, and that the knowledge of his doctrine, without the real effects of it upon our lives, will bring no man to heaven. In the beginning of this chapter, our great Lord and Maſter, to teſtify his love to his diſciples, and to give them a lively inſtance and example of that great virtue of humility, is pleaſed to condeſcend to a very low and mean office, ſuch as was uſed to be performed by ſervants to their maſters, and not by the maſter to his ſervants; namely, to waſh their feet; and when he had done this, he asks them if they did underſtand the meaning of this ſtrange action. *Know ye what I have done unto you? Ye call me Maſter and Lord, and ye ſay well, for ſo I am: If I then your Lord and Maſter have waſhed your feet, ye ought alſo to waſh one anothers feet; for I have given you an example, that ye ſhould do as I have done to you, Verily, verily, I ſay unto you, the ſervant is not greater than the Lord, neither he that is ſent, greater than he that ſent him; if ye know theſe things, happy are ye if ye do them.* As if he had ſaid, This which I have now done, is eaſy to be underſtood, and ſo likewiſe are all thoſe other Chriſtian graces and virtues, which I have heretofore by my doctrine and example recommended to you; but it is not enough to know theſe things, but ye muſt likewiſe do them. The end and the life of all our knowledge in religion, is to put in practice what we know. It is neceſſary indeed that we ſhould know our duty, but knowledge alone will never bring us to that happineſs, which religion deſigns to make us partakers of, if our knowledge have not its due and proper influence upon our lives. Nay, ſo far will our knowledge be from making us happy, if it be ſeparated from the virtues of a good life, that it will prove one of the heavieſt aggravations of our miſery; and it is as if he had ſaid, *if ye know theſe things, wo be unto you, if ye do them not.*

From theſe words then, I ſhall obſerve theſe three things, which I ſhall ſpeak but briefly to:

Firſt, That the knowledge of God's will, and our duty, is neceſſary to the practice of it; *if ye know*

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theſe things, which ſuppoſeth that we muſt know our duty, before we can do it.

Secondly, That the knowledge of our duty, and the practice of it, may be, and too often are ſeparated. This likewiſe the text ſuppoſeth, that men may know their duty, and yet not do it; and that this is very frequent, which is the reaſon why our Saviour gives this caution.

Thirdly, That the practice of religion, and the doing of what we know to be our duty, is the only way to happineſs; *if ye know theſe things, happy are ye if ye do them.* I begin with the

Firſt of theſe, namely, That the knowledge of God's will and our duty, is neceſſary in order to the practice of it. The truth of this propoſition is ſo clear and evident at firſt view, that nothing can obſcure it, and bring it in queſtion, but to endeavour to prove it; and therefore inſtead of ſpending time in that, I ſhall take occaſion from it juſtly to reprove that prepoſterous courſe which is taken, and openly avowed and juſtified by ſome, as the ſafeſt and beſt way to make men religious, and to bring them to happineſs; namely, by taking away from them the means of knowledge, as if the beſt way to bring men to do the will of God, were to keep them from knowing it. For what elſe can be the meaning of that maxim ſo current in the church of Rome, that *ignorance is the mother of devotion?* or of that ſtrange and injurious practice of theirs, of locking up from the people that great ſtore-houſe and treaſury of divine knowlege, *the holy ſcriptures*, in an unknown tongue?

I know very well, that in juſtification of this hard uſage of their people it is pretended, that knowledge is apt to puff men up, to make them proud and contentious, refractory and diſobedient, and heretical, and what not? and particularly, that the free and familiar uſe of the holy ſcriptures permitted to the people, hath miniſtred occaſion to the people of falling into great and dangerous errors, and of making great diſturbance and diviſions among Chriſtians. For an-

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ſwer to this pretence, I deſire theſe four or five things may be conſidered:

Firſt, That unleſs this be the natural and neceſſary effect of knowledge in religion, and of the free uſe of the holy ſcriptures, there is no force in this reaſon; and if this be the proper and natural effect of this knowledge, then this reaſon will reach a great way farther, than thoſe who make uſe of it are willing it ſhould.

Secondly, That this is not the natural and neceſſary effect of knowledge in religion, but only accidental, and proceeding from mens abuſe of it; for which the thing itſelf is not to be taken away.

Thirdly, That the proper and natural effects and conſequences of ignorance, are equally pernicious, and much more certain and unavoidable, than thoſe which are accidentally occaſioned by knowledge.

Fourthly, That if this reaſon be good, it is much ſtronger for withholding the ſcriptures from the Prieſts and the learned, than from the people.

Fifthly, That this danger was as great, and as well known in the Apoſtles times, and yet they took a quite contrary courſe.

Firſt, I deſire it may be conſidered, that unleſs this be the natural and neceſſary effect of knowledge in religion, and of the free uſe of the holy ſcriptures, there is no force in this reaſon; for that which is neceſſary, or highly uſeful, ought not to be taken away, becauſe it is liable to be perverted, and abuſed to ill purpoſes. If it ought, then not only knowledge in religion, but all other knowledge ought to be reſtrained and ſuppreſſed; for all knowledge is apt to puff up, and liable to be abuſed to many ill purpoſes. At this rate, light, and liberty, and reaſon, yea and life itſelf, ought all to be taken away, becauſe they are all greatly abuſed by many men, to ſome ill purpoſes or other; ſo that unleſs theſe ill effects do naturally and neceſſarily ſpring from knowledge in religion, the objection from them is of no force; and if they do neceſſarily flow from it, then this reaſon will reach a great way farther than thoſe that make uſe of it are willing it ſhould; for if this

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be true, that the knowledge of religion, as it is revealed in the holy ſcriptures, is of its own nature ſo pernicious, as to make men proud and contentious, and heretical, and diſobedient to authority, then the blame of all this would fall upon our bleſſed Saviour, for revealing ſo pernicious a doctrine, and upon his Apoſtles for publiſhing this doctrine in a known tongue to all mankind, and thereby laying the foundation of perpetual ſchiſms and hereſies in the church.

Secondly, But this is not the natural and neceſſary effect of knowledge in religion, but only accidental, and proceeding from mens abuſe of it, for which the thing itſelf ought not to be taken away. And thus much certainly they will grant, becauſe it cannot with any face be denied; and if ſo, then the means of knowledge are not to be denied, but only men are to be cautioned not to pervert and abuſe them. And if any man abuſe the holy ſcriptures, to the patronizing of error or hereſy, or to any other bad purpoſe, he does it on his peril, and muſt give an account to God for it, but ought not to be deprived of the means of knowledge, for fear he ſhould make an ill uſe of them. We muſt not hinder men from being Chriſtians, to preſerve them from being Hereticks, and put out mens eyes for fear they ſhould ſome time or other take upon them to diſpute their way with their guides.

I remember that St. Paul, 1 Cor. viii. 1. takes notice of this accidental inconvenience of knowledge, that it *puffeth up*, and that this pride occaſioned great contentions and diviſions among them; but the remedy which he preſcribes againſt this miſchief of knowledge, is not to withhold from men the means of it, and to celebrate the ſervice of God, the prayers of the church, and the reading of the ſcripture *in an unknown tongue*, but quite contrary, chap. xiv. of that epiſtle, he ſtrictly enjoins, that the ſervice of God in the church be ſo performed, as may be for the edification of the people; which he ſays cannot be, if it be celebrated *in an unknown tongue*; and the remedy he preſcribes

ſcribes againſt the accidental miſchief and inconvenience of knowledge, is not ignorance, but charity, to govern their knowledge, and to help them to make a right uſe of it; ver. 20 of that chap. after he had declared that the ſervice of God ought to be performed in a known tongue, he immediately adds, *Brethren, be not children in underſtanding, howbeit in malice be ye children, but in underſtanding be ye men.* He commends knowledge, he encourageth it, he requires it of all Chriſtians; ſo far is he from checking the purſuit of it, and depriving the people of the means of it. And indeed there is nothing in the Chriſtian religion, but what is fit for every man to know, becauſe there is nothing in it, but what is deſigned to promote holineſs and a good life; and if men make any other uſe of their knowledge, it is their own fault, for it certainly tends to make men good; and being ſo uſeful and neceſſary to ſo good a purpoſe, men ought not to be debarred of it.

Thirdly, Let it be conſidered, that the proper and natural effects and conſequences of ignorance are equally pernicious, and much more certain and unavoidable, than thoſe which are accidentally occaſioned by knowledge; for ſo far as a man is ignorant of his duty, it is impoſſible he ſhould do it. He that hath the knowledge of religion, may be a bad Chriſtian, but he that is deſtitute of it, can be none at all. Or if ignorance do beget and promote ſome kind of devotion in men, it is ſuch a devotion as is not properly religion, but ſuperſtition; the ignorant man may be zealouſly ſuperſtitious, but without ſome meaſure of knowledge no man can be truly religious. *That the ſoul be without knowledge it is not good*, ſays Solomon, Prov. xix. 2. becauſe good practices depend upon our knowledge, and muſt be directed by it; when as a man that is trained up only to the outward performance of ſome things in religion, as to the ſaying over ſo many prayers in an unknown tongue, this man cannot be truly religious, becauſe nothing is religious that is not a reaſonable ſervice; and no ſervice can be reaſonable, that is not directed by our underſtandings. Indeed, if the end of

prayer were only to give God to underſtand what we want, it were all one what language we prayed in, and whether we underſtood what we asked of him or not; but ſo long as the end of prayer is to teſtify the ſenſe of our own wants, and of our dependence upon God for the ſupply of them, it is impoſſible that any man ſhould in any tolerable propriety of ſpeech be ſaid to pray, who does not underſtand what he asks; and the saying over ſo many *Pater Noſters* by one that does not underſtand the meaning of them, is no more a prayer than the repeating over ſo many verſes in Virgil. And if this were good reaſoning, that men muſt not be permitted to know ſo much as they can in religion, for fear they ſhould grow troubleſome with their knowledge, then certainly the beſt way in the world to maintain peace in the Chriſtian church, would be to let the people know nothing at all in religion; and the beſt way to ſecure the ignorance of the people would be to keep the Prieſts as ignorant as the people, and then to be ſure they could teach them nothing: but then the miſchief would be, that out of a fondneſs to maintain peace in the Chriſtian church, there would be no church, nor no Chriſtianity; which would be the ſame wiſe contrivance, as if a Prince ſhould deſtroy his ſubjects, to keep his kingdom quiet.

Fourthly, Let us likewiſe conſider, that if this reaſon be good, it is much ſtronger for withholding the ſcriptures from the Prieſts, and the learned, than from the people; becauſe the danger of ſtarting errors and hereſies, and countenancing them from ſcripture, and managing them plauſibly and with advantage, is much more to be feared from the learned, than from the common people; and the experience of all ages hath ſhewn, that the great broachers and abettors of hereſy in the Chriſtian church, have been men of learning and wit; and moſt of the famous hereſies, that are recorded in eccleſiaſtical hiſtory, have their names from ſome learned man or other; ſo that it is a great miſtake to think, that the way to prevent error and hereſy in the church, is to take the Bible out of the hands of the people, ſo long as the free

free uſe of it is permitted to men of learning and skill, in whoſe hands the danger of perverting it is much greater. The ancient fathers, I am ſure, do frequently preſcribe to the people the conſtant and careful reading of the holy ſcriptures, as the ſureſt antidote againſt the poiſon of dangerous errors, and damnable hereſies; and if there be ſo much danger of ſeduction into error from the oracles of truth, by what other or better means can we hope to be ſecured againſt this danger? If the word of God be ſo croſs and improper a means to this end, one would think that the teachings of men ſhould be much leſs effectual; ſo that men muſt either be left in their ignorance, or they muſt be permitted to learn from the word of truth; and whatever force this reaſon of the danger of hereſy hath in it, to deprive the common people of the uſe of the ſcriptures, I am ſure it is much ſtronger to wreſt them out of the hands of the Prieſts and the learned, becauſe they are much more capable of perverting them to ſo bad a purpoſe.

Fifthly, and laſtly, This danger was as great and viſible in the age of the Apoſtles, as it is now; and yet they took a quite contrary courſe: there were hereſies then, as well as now, and either the ſcriptures were not thought, by being in the hands of the people, to be the cauſe of them, or they did not think the taking of them out of their hands a proper remedy. The Apoſtles in all their epiſtles do earneſtly exhort the people *to grow in knowledge*, and commend them for *ſearching the ſcriptures*, and charge them that *the word of God ſhould dwell richly in them*. And St. Peter takes particular notice of ſome men wreſting ſome difficult paſſages in St. Paul's epiſtles, as likewiſe in the other ſcriptures, to their own deſtruction, 2 Pet. iii. 16. where ſpeaking of St. Paul's epiſtles, he ſays, *there are ſome things hard to be underſtood, which they that are unlearned and unſtable wreſt, as they do alſo the other ſcriptures, to their own deſtruction*. Here the danger objected is taken notice of; but the remedy preſcribed by St. Peter, is not to take from the people the uſe of the

ſcriptures, and to keep them in ignorance; but after he had cautioned againſt the like weakneſs and errors, he exhorts them to *grow in knowledge*, ver. 17. 18. *Ye therefore, beloved, ſeeing ye know theſe things before*, (that is, ſeeing ye are ſo plainly told and warned of this danger) *beware leſt ye alſo being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own ſtedfaſtneſs; but grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt*, (that is, of the Chriſtian religion;) believing, it ſeems, that the more knowledge they had in religion, the leſs they would be in danger of falling into damnable errors. I proceed to the

Second obſervation, *viz.* That the knowledge of our duty, and the practice of it, may be and often are ſeparated. This likewiſe is ſuppoſed in the text, that men may, and often do know the will of God, and their duty, and yet fail in the practice of it. Our Saviour elſewhere ſuppoſeth, that many *know their maſter's will who do not do it*; and he compares thoſe *that hear his ſayings, and do them not, to a fooliſh man that built his houſe upon the ſand.* And St. James ſpeaks of ſome, *who are hearers of the word only, but not doers of it*, and for that reaſon fall ſhort of happineſs. And this is no wonder, becauſe the attaining to that knowledge of religion which is neceſſary to ſalvation is no difficult task. A great part of it is written in our hearts, and we cannot be ignorant of it if we would; as that there is a God, and a providence, and another ſtate after this life, wherein we ſhall be rewarded, or puniſhed, according as we have lived here in this world; that God is to be worſhipped, to be prayed to for what we want, and to be praiſed for what we enjoy. Thus far nature inſtructs men in religion, and in the great duties of morality, as juſtice and temperance, and the like. And as for revealed religion, as that Jeſus Chriſt the Son of God came in our nature to ſave us, by revealing our duty more clearly and fully to us, by giving us a more perfect example of holineſs and obedience in his own life and converſation, and by dying for our ſins, and riſing again for our juſtification; theſe are things

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which men may eaſily underſtand; and yet for all that, they are difficultly brought to the practice of religion.

I ſhall inſtance in three ſorts of perſons, in whom the knowledge of religion is more remarkably ſeparated from the practice of it; and for diſtinction's ſake, I may call them by theſe three names; the ſpeculative, the formal, and the hypocritical Chriſtian. The firſt of theſe makes religion only a ſcience, the ſecond takes it up for a faſhion, the third makes ſome worldly advantage of it, and ſerves ſome ſecular intereſt and deſign by it. All theſe are upon ſeveral accounts concerned to underſtand ſomething of religion; but yet will not be brought to the practice of it.

The *firſt* of theſe, whom I call the ſpeculative Chriſtian, is he who makes religion only a ſcience, and ſtudies it as a piece of learning, and part of that general knowledge in which he affects the reputation of being a maſter; he hath no deſign to practiſe it, but he is loth to be ignorant of it, becauſe the knowledge of it is a good ornament of converſation, and will ſerve for diſcourſe and entertainment among thoſe who are diſpoſed to be grave and ſerious; and becauſe he does not intend to practiſe it, he paſſeth over thoſe things which are plain and eaſy to be underſtood, and applies himſelf chiefly to the conſideration of thoſe things which are more abſtruſe, and will afford matter of controverſy and ſubtle diſpute, as the doctrine of the Trinity, Predeſtination, Free-will, and the like. Of this temper ſeem many of the ſchool-men of old to have been, who made it their great ſtudy and buſineſs to puzzle religion, and to make every thing in it intricate, by ſtarting infinite queſtions and difficulties about the plaineſt truths: and of the ſame rank uſually are the heads and leaders of parties and factions in religion, who by needleſs controverſies and endleſs diſputes about ſomething or other, commonly of no great moment in religion, hinder themſelves and others from minding the practice of the great and ſubſtantial duties of a good life.

Secondly, There is the formal Chriſtian, who takes up religion for a faſhion. He is born and bred in a nation where Chriſtianity is profeſſed and countenanced, and therefore thinks it convenient for him to know ſomething of it. Of this ſort there are, I fear, a great many, who read the ſcriptures ſometimes as others do, to know the hiſtory of it; and go to church, and hear the goſpel preached, and by this means come in ſome meaſure to underſtand the hiſtory of our Saviour, and the Chriſtian doctrine; but do not at all bend themſelves to comply with the great end and deſign of it; they do not heartily endeavour to form and faſhion their lives according to the laws and precepts of it; they think they are very good Chriſtians, if they can give an account of the articles of their faith, profeſs their belief in God and Chriſt, and declare that they hope to be ſaved by him, though they take no care to keep his commandments. Theſe are they of whom our Saviour ſpeaks, Luke vi. 46. who *call him Lord, Lord; but do not the things which he ſaid.*

Thirdly, Hypocritical Chriſtians, who make an intereſt of religion, and ſerve ſome worldly deſign by it. Theſe are concerned to underſtand religion more than ordinary, that they may counterfeit it handſomely, and may not be at a loſs when they have occaſion to put on the garb of it. And this is one part of the character which the Apoſtle gives of thoſe perſons, who he foretells would appear in the laſt days, 2 Tim. iii. 2. he ſays they ſhould be *lovers of their own ſelves, covetous, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleaſure more than lovers of God, having a form of godlineſs, but denying the power of it.*

Now theſe men do not love religion, but they have occaſion to make uſe of it, and therefore they will have no more of it than will juſt ſerve their purpoſe and deſign. And indeed he that hath any other deſign in religion than to pleaſe God, and ſave his ſoul, needs no more than ſo much knowledge of it, as will ſerve him to act a part in it upon occaſion. I come to the

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Third and laſt obſervation, *viz.* That the practice of religion, and the doing of what we know to be our duty, is the only way to happineſs; *if ye know theſe things, happy are ye if ye do them*; not *if ye know theſe things happy are ye*; but *if ye know and do them.* Now to convince men of ſo important a truth, I ſhall endeavour to make out theſe two things:

Firſt, That the goſpel makes the practice of religion a neceſſary condition of our happineſs.

Secondly, That the nature and reaſon of the thing makes it a neceſſary qualification for it.

Firſt, The goſpel makes the practice of religion a neceſſary condition of our happineſs. Our Saviour in his firſt ſermon, where he repeats the promiſe of bleſſedneſs ſo often, makes no promiſe of it to the mere knowledge of religion, but to the habit and practice of Chriſtian graces and virtues, of meekneſs, and humility, and mercifulneſs, and righteouſneſs, and peaceableneſs, and purity, and patience under ſufferings and perſecutions for righteouſneſs ſake. And Matth. vii. 21. our Saviour doth moſt fully declare, that the happineſs which he promiſes, did not belong to thoſe who made profeſſion of his name, and were ſo well acquainted with his doctrine, as to be able to inſtruct others, if themſelves in the mean time did not practiſe it: *Not every one that ſaith unto me, Lord, Lord, ſhall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the will of my Father which is in heaven; Many will ſay unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not propheſied in thy name, and in thy name caſt out devils, and done many wondrous works? and then will I profeſs unto them, I never knew you: Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity.* Though they profeſs to know him, yet becauſe their lives were not anſwerable to the knowledge which they had of him, and his doctrine, he declares that he will not know them, but bids them depart from him. And then he goes on to ſhew, that though a man attend to the doctrine of Chriſt, and gain the knowledge of it; yet if it

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do not deſcend into his life, and govern his actions, all that man's hopes of heaven are fond and groundleſs; and only that man's hopes of heaven are well grounded, who knows the doctrine of Chriſt, and does it, ver. 24. *Whoſoever heareth theſe ſayings of mine, and doth them, I will liken him to a wiſe man who built his houſe upon a rock, and the rain deſcended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that houſe, and it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth theſe ſayings of mine, and doth them not, ſhall be likened to a fooliſh man, who built his houſe upon the ſand, and the rain deſcended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that houſe, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.* Though a man had a knowledge of religion, as great and perfect as that which Solomon had of natural things, *large as the ſand upon the ſea ſhore*, yet all this knowledge ſeparated from practice would be like the ſand alſo in another reſpect, a weak foundation for any man to build his hopes of happineſs upon.

To the ſame purpoſe St. Paul ſpeaks, Rom. ii. 13. *Not the hearers of the law are juſt before God; but the doers of the law ſhall be juſtified.* So likewiſe St. James, chap. i. 22. *Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own ſelves*; and ver. 25. *Whoſo looketh into the perfect law of liberty,* (that is, the law or doctrine of the goſpel) *and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man ſhall be bleſſed in his deed*; and therefore he adds, that the truth and reality of religion is to be meaſured by the effects of it, in the government of our words, and ordering of our lives, ver. 26. *If any man among you ſeem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to viſit the fatherleſs and widow in their affliction, and to keep himſelf unſpotted from the world.* Men talk of religion, and keep a great ſtir about it; but nothing will paſs for true religion before God, but the virtuous and charitable actions of

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a good life; and God will accept no man to eternal life upon any other condition. So the Apoſtle tells us moſt expreſly, Heb. xii. 14. *Follow peace with all men, and holineſs, without which no man ſhall ſee the Lord.*

Secondly, As God hath made the practice of religion a neceſſary condition of our happineſs, ſo the very nature and reaſon of the thing makes it a neceſſary qualification for it. It is neceſſary that we become like to God, in order to the enjoyment of him; and nothing makes us like to God, but the practice of holineſs and goodneſs. Knowledge indeed is a divine perfection; but that alone, as it doth not render a man like God, ſo neither doth it diſpoſe him for the enjoyment of him. If a man had the underſtanding of an Angel, he might for all that be a devil; *he that committeth ſin is of the devil*; and whatever knowledge ſuch a man may have, he is of a deviliſh temper and diſpoſition: *but every one that doth righteouſneſs is born of God.* By this we are like God, and only by our likeneſs to him, do we become capable of the ſight and enjoyment of him; therefore every man that hopes to be happy by the bleſſed ſight of God in the next life, muſt endeavour after holineſs in this life. So the ſame Apoſtle tells us, 1 John iii. 3. *Every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himſelf, even as he is pure.* A wicked temper and diſpoſition of mind is in the very nature of the thing, utterly inconſiſtent with all reaſonable hopes of heaven.

Thus I have ſhewn that the practice of religion, and the doing of what we know to be our duty, is the only way to happineſs.

And now the proper inference from all this is, to put men upon the careful practice of religion. Let no man content himſelf with the knowledge of his duty, unleſs he do it; and to this purpoſe I ſhall briefly urge theſe three conſiderations:

Firſt, This is the great end of all our knowledge in religion, to practiſe what we know. The knowledge of God and of our duty hath ſo eſſential a reſpect to practice, that the ſcripture will hardly allow

low it to be properly called knowledge, unleſs it have an influence upon our lives, 1 *John* ii. 3, 4. *Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that ſaith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.*

Secondly, Practice is the beſt way to increaſe and perfect our knowledge. Knowledge directs us in our practice, but practice confirms and increaſeth our knowledge, John vii. 17. *If any man will do the will of God, he ſhall know of the doctrine.* The beſt way to know God, is to be like him ourſelves, and to have the lively image of his perfections imprinted upon our ſouls; and the beſt way to underſtand the Chriſtian religion, is ſeriouſly to ſet about the practice of it; this will give a man a better notion of Chriſtianity than any ſpeculation can.

Thirdly, Without the practice of religion, our knowledge will be ſo far from being any furtherance and advantage to our happineſs, that it will be one of the unhappieſt aggravations of our miſery. He that is ignorant of his duty, hath ſome excuſe to pretend for himſelf: but he that underſtands the Chriſtian religion, and does not live according to it, hath no cloak for his ſin. The defects of our knowledge, unleſs they be groſs and wilful, will find an eaſy pardon with God: but the faults of our lives ſhall be ſeverely puniſhed, when we know our duty and would not do it. I will conclude with that of our Saviour, Luke xii. 47. 48. *That ſervant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himſelf, neither did according to his will, ſhall be beaten with many ſtripes; for unto whomſoever much is given, of him much ſhall be required.* When we come into the other world, no conſideration will ſting us more, and add more to the rage of our torments than this, that we did wickedly, when we underſtood to have done better; and choſe to make ourſelves miſerable, when we knew ſo well the way to have been happy.

SER-

SERMON CXIV.

Practice in religion neceſſary, in proportion to our knowledge.

LUKE xii. 47, 48.

And that ſervant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himſelf, neither did according to his will, ſhall be beaten with many ſtripes: But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of ſtripes, ſhall be beaten with few ſtripes. For unto whomſoever much is given, of him ſhall be much required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.

IN proſecution of the argument which I handled in my laſt diſcourſe, namely, that the knowledge of our duty, without the practice of it, will not bring us to happineſs, I ſhall proceed to ſhew, that if our practice be not anſwerable to our knowledge, this will be a great aggravation both of our ſin and puniſhment.

And to this purpoſe, I have pitched upon theſe words of our Lord, which are the application of two parables, which he had delivered before, to ſtir up men to a diligent and careful practice of their duty, that ſo they may be in a continual readineſs and preparation for the coming of their Lord. The firſt parable is more general, and concerns all men, who are repreſented as ſo many ſervants in a great family, from which the Lord is abſent, and they being uncertain of the time of his return, ſhould always be in a condition and poſture to receive him. Upon the hearing of this parable, Peter enquires of our Saviour, whether he intended this only for his diſciples, or for all? To which queſtion our Saviour returns an anſwer in another parable, which more particularly concerned them; who becauſe they were to be the

the chief rulers and governors of his church, are repreſented by the ſtewards of a great family, ver. 42. *Who then is that faithful and wiſe ſteward, whom his Lord ſhall make ruler over his houſhold, to give them their portion of meat in due ſeaſon?* if he diſcharge his duty, bleſſed is he; but if he ſhall take occaſion in his Lord's abſence to domineer over his fellow-ſervants, and riotouſly to waſte his Lord's goods, his Lord, when he comes, will puniſh him after a more ſevere and exemplary manner.

And then follows the application of the whole, in the words of the text, *And that ſervant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himſelf, neither did according to his will, ſhall be beaten with many ſtripes.* As if he had ſaid, and well may ſuch a ſervant deſerve ſo ſevere a puniſhment, who having ſuch a truſt committed to him, and knowing his Lord's will ſo much better, yet does contrary to it; upon which our Saviour takes occaſion to compare the fault and puniſhment of thoſe who have greater advantages and opportunities of knowing their duty, with thoſe who are ignorant of it; *That ſervant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himſelf, neither did according to it, ſhall be beaten with many ſtripes: But he that knew not, but did commit things worthy of ſtripes, ſhall be beaten with few ſtripes.* And then he adds the reaſon and equity of this proceeding, *For unto whomſoever much is given, of him ſhall be much required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.*

The words in general do allude to that law of the Jews, mentioned Deut. xxv. 2. where the judge is required to ſee the malefactor puniſhed according to his fault, by a certain number of ſtripes; in relation to which known law among the Jews, our Saviour here ſays, that *thoſe who knew their Lord's will, and did it not, ſhould be beaten with many ſtripes: But thoſe who knew it not, ſhould be beaten with few ſtripes.* So that there are two obſervations ly plainly before us in the words:

Firſt, That the greater advantages and opportunities any man hath of knowing his duty, if he do it not,

not, the greater will be his condemnation; *the ſervant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himſelf, neither did according to it, ſhall be beaten with many ſtripes.*

Secondly, That ignorance is a great excuſe of mens faults, and will leſſen their puniſhment, *but he that knew not, but did commit things worthy of ſtripes, ſhall be beaten with few ſtripes.*

I ſhall begin with the latter of theſe firſt, becauſe it will make way for the other, *viz.* That ignorance is a great excuſe of mens faults, and will leſſen their puniſhment; *he that knew not, but did commit things worthy of ſtripes, ſhall be beaten with few ſtripes.*

For the clearing of this, it will be requiſite to conſider what ignorance it is which our Saviour here ſpeaks of; and this is neceſſary to be enquired into, becauſe it is certain that there is ſome ſort of ignorance which doth wholly excuſe and clear from all manner of guilt; and there is another ſort, which doth either not at all, or very little extenuate the faults of men; ſo that it muſt be a third ſort different from both theſe, which our Saviour here means.

Firſt, There is an ignorance which doth wholly excuſe and clear from all manner of guilt, and that is an abſolute and invincible ignorance, when a perſon is wholly ignorant of the thing, which if he knew, he ſhould be bound to do, but neither can nor could have helped it, that he is ignorant of it; that is, he either had not the capacity, or wanted the means and opportunity of knowing it. In this caſe a perſon is in no fault, if he did not do what he never knew, nor could know to be his duty. For God meaſures the faults of men, by their wills, and if there be no defect there, there can be no guilt; for no man is guilty, but he that is conſcious to himſelf that he would not do what he knew he ought to do, or would do what he knew he ought not to do: Now if a man be ſimply and invincibly ignorant of his duty, his neglect of it is altogether involuntary; for the will hath nothing to do, where the underſtanding doth not firſt direct. And this is the caſe of children

who are not yet come to the uſe of reaſon; for though they may do that which is materially a fault, yet it is none in them, becauſe by reaſon of their incapacity, they are at preſent invincibly ignorant of what they ought to do. And this is the caſe likewiſe of idiots, who are under a natural incapacity of knowledge, and ſo far as they are ſo, nothing that they do is imputed to them as a fault. The ſame may be ſaid of diſtracted perſons, who are deprived either wholly, or at ſome times of the uſe of their underſtandings: ſo far, and ſo long as they are thus deprived, they are free from all guilt; and to perſons who have the free and perfect uſe of their reaſon, no neglect of any duty is imputed, of which they are abſolutely and invincibly ignorant. For inſtance, it is a duty incumbent upon all mankind, to believe in the Son of God, where he is ſufficiently manifeſted and revealed to them; but thoſe who never heard of him, nor had any opportunity of coming to the knowledge of him, ſhall not be condemned for this infidelity, becauſe it is impoſſible they ſhould *believe on him of whom they never heard.* They may indeed be condemned upon other accounts, for ſinning againſt the light of nature, and for not obeying the law which was written in their hearts; for what the Apoſtle ſays of the revelation of the law, is as true of any other revelation of God, *as many as have ſinned without law, ſhall alſo periſh without law; and as many as have ſinned under the law, ſhall be judged by the law,* Rom. ii. 12. In like manner, thoſe who have ſinned without the goſpel, (that is, who never had the knowledge of it) ſhall not be condemned for any offence againſt that revelation which was never made to them, but for their violation of the law of nature; only they that have *ſinned under the goſpel,* ſhall be *judged by it.*

Secondly, There is likewiſe another ſort of ignorance, which either does not at all, or very little extenuate the faults of men, when men are not only ignorant, but chuſe to be ſo; that is, when they wilfully neglect thoſe means and opportunities of knowledge which are afforded to them; ſuch as Job ſpeaks of, Job xxi. 14. *Who ſay unto God, Depart from*

from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. And this sort of ignorance many among the Jews were guilty of, when our Saviour came and preached to them, but they would not be instructed by him; *the light came among them, but they loved darkness rather than light*, as he himself says of them; and as he says elsewhere of the Pharisees, *they rejected the council of God against themselves*, they wilfully shut their eyes against that light which offered itself to them; *they would not see with their eyes, nor hear with their ears, nor understand with their hearts, that they might be converted and healed.* Now an ignorance in this degree wilful, can hardly be imagined to carry any excuse at all in it. He that knew not his Lord's will, because he would not know it, because he wilfully rejected the means of coming to the knowledge of it, deserves to be beaten with as many stripes as if he had known it; because he might have known it, and would not. He that will not take notice of the King's proclamation, or will stop his ears when it is read, and afterwards offends against it, does equally deserve punishment with those who have read it, and heard it, and disobeyed it; because he was as grosly faulty in not knowing it; and there is no reason that any man's gross fault should be his excuse.

So that it is neither of these sorts of ignorance that our Saviour means, neither absolute and invincible ignorance, nor that which is grosly wilful and affected. For the first, men deserve not be beaten at all, because they cannot help it; for the latter, they deserve not to be excused, because they might have helped their ignorance, and would not.

But our Saviour here speaks of such an ignorance as does in a good degree extenuate the fault, and yet not wholly excuse it; for he says of them, that they *knew not their Lord's will*, and yet that this ignorance did not wholly excuse them from blame, nor exempt them from punishment, *but they should be beaten with few stripes.* In the

Third place then, there is an ignorance which is in some degree faulty, and yet does in a great measure excuse the faults which proceed from it; and this is when

men are not abſolutely ignorant of their duty, but only in compariſon of others, who have a far more clear and diſtinct knowledge of it; and though they do not groſsly and wilfully neglect the means of further knowledge, yet perhaps they do not make the beſt uſe they might of the opportunities they have of knowing their duty better; and therefore, in compariſon of others who have far better means and advantages of knowing their Lord's will, they may be ſaid not to know it, though they are not ſimply ignorant of it, but only have a more obſcure and uncertain knowledge of it. Now this ignorance does in a great meaſure excuſe ſuch perſons, and extenuate their crimes, in compariſon of thoſe who had a clearer and more perfect knowledge of their maſter's will; and yet it does not free them from all guilt; becauſe they did not live up to that degree of knowledge which they had; and perhaps if they had uſed more care and induſtry, they might have known their Lord's will better. And this was the caſe of the Heathen, who, in compariſon of thoſe who enjoyed the light of the goſpel, might be ſaid not to have known their Lord's will, though, as to many parts of their duty, they had ſome directions from natural light, and their conſciences did urge them to many things by the obſcure apprehenſions and hopes of a future reward, and the fear of a future puniſhment. But this was but a very obſcure and uncertain knowledge, in compariſon of the clear light of the goſpel, which hath diſcovered to us our duty ſo plainly by the laws and precepts of it, and hath preſented us with ſuch powerful motives and arguments to obedience in the promiſes and threatenings of it. And this likewiſe is the caſe of many Chriſtians, who either through the natural ſlowneſs of their underſtandings, or by the neglect of their parents and teachers, or other circumſtances of their education, have had far leſs means and advantages of knowledge than others. God does not expect ſo much from thoſe, as from others, to whom he hath given greater capacity, and advantages of knowledge; and when our Lord ſhall come to call his ſervants to an ac-

account, they shall be beaten with fewer stripes than others: They shall not wholly escape, because they were not wholly ignorant; but by how much they had less knowledge than others, by so much their punishment shall be lighter.

And there is all the equity in the world it should be so, that men should be accountable according to what they have received, and that to whom less is given, less should be required at their hands. The scripture hath told us, that *God will judge the world in righteousness*; now justice does require, that in taxing the punishment of offenders, every thing should be considered that may be a just excuse and extenuation of their crimes, and that accordingly their punishment should be abated. Now the greatest extenuation of any fault is ignorance, which when it proceeds from no fault of ours, no fault can proceed from it; so that so far as any man is innocently ignorant of his duty, so far he is excusable for the neglect of it: for every degree of ignorance takes off so much from the perverseness of the will; *& nihil ardet in inferno, nisi propria voluntas*; "No-"thing is punished in hell, but what is voluntary, "and proceeds from our wills."

I do not intend this discourse for any commendation of ignorance, or encouragement to it. For knowledge hath many advantages above it, and is much more desirable, if we use it well; and if we do not, it is our own fault. If we be not wanting to ourselves, we may be much happier by our knowledge, than any man can be by his ignorance; for though ignorance may plead an excuse, yet it can hope for no reward; and it is always better to need no excuse, than to have the best in the world ready at hand to plead for ourselves. Besides, that we may do well to consider, that ignorance is no where an excuse where it is cherished; so that it would be the vainest thing in the world for any man to foster it, in hopes thereby to excuse himself; for where it is wilful and chosen, it is a fault, and (as I said before) it is the most unreasonable thing in the world, that any man's fault should prove his excuse. So that this can be no en-

couragement to ignorance, to ſay that it extenuates the faults of men: for it does not extenuate them, whenever it is wilful and affected; and whenever it is deſigned and choſen, it is wilful; and then no man can reaſonably deſign to continue ignorant, that he may have an excuſe for his faults, becauſe then the ignorance is wilful, and whenever it is ſo, it ceaſeth to be an excuſe.

I the rather ſpeak this, becauſe ignorance hath had the good fortune to meet with great patrons in the world, and to be extolled, though not upon this account, yet upon another, for which there is leſs pretence of reaſon; as if it were the mother of devotion. Of ſuperſtition I grant it is, and of this we ſee plentiful proof, among thoſe who are ſo careful to preſerve and cheriſh it: but that true piety and devotion ſhould ſpring from it, is as unlikely, as that darkneſs ſhould produce light. I do hope indeed, and charitably believe, that the ignorance in which ſome are detained by their teachers and governors, will be a real excuſe, to as many of them as are otherwiſe honeſt and ſincere; but I doubt not, but the errors and faults which proceed from this ignorance, will ly heavy upon thoſe who keep them in it. I proceed to the

Second obſervation, That the greater advantages and opportunities any man hath of knowing the will of God, and his duty, the greater will be his condemnation if he do not do it. *The ſervant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himſelf, neither did according to it, ſhall be beaten with many ſtripes. Which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himſelf*; the preparation of our mind to do the will of God, whenever there is occaſion and opportunity for it, is accepted with him. A will rightly diſpoſed to obey God, though it be not brought into act for want of opportunity, does not loſe its reward: but when, notwithſtanding we know our Lord's will, there are neither of theſe, neither the act, nor the preparation and reſolution of doing it, what puniſhment may we not expect?

The juſt God, in puniſhing the ſins of men, pro-

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portions the punishment to the crime, and where the crime is greater, the punishment riseth; as amongst the Jews, where the crime was small, the malefactor was sentenced to a few stripes; where it was great, he was beaten with many. Thus our Saviour represents the great Judge of the world dealing with sinners; according as their sins are aggravated, he will add to their punishment. Now after all the aggravations of sin, there is none that doth more intrinsically heighten the malignity of it, than when it is committed against the clear knowledge of our duty, and that upon these three accounts:

First, Because the knowledge of God's will is so great an advantage to the doing of it.

Secondly, Because it is a great obligation upon us to the doing of it.

Thirdly, Because the neglect of our duty in this case, cannot be without a great deal of wilfulness and contempt. I shall speak briefly to these three.

First, Because the knowledge of God's will is so great an advantage to the doing of it; and every advantage of doing our duty, is a certain aggravation of our neglect of it. And this is the reason which our Saviour adds here in the text, *For to whomsoever much is given, of them much will be required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.* It was, no doubt, a great discouragement and disadvantage to the Heathen, that they were so doubtful concerning the will of God, and in many cases left to the uncertainty of their own reason, by what way and means they might best apply themselves to the pleasing of him; and this discouraged several of the wisest of them from all serious endeavours in religion, thinking it as good to do nothing, as to be mistaken about it. Others that were more naturally devout, and could not satisfy their consciences without some expressions of religion, fell into various superstitions, and were ready to embrace any way of worship which custom prescribed, or the fancies of men could suggest to them; and hence sprang all the stupid and barbarous idolatries of the Heathen. For ignorance growing upon

upon the world, that natural propenſion which was in the minds of men to religion, and the worſhip of a Deity, for want of certain direction, expreſſed itſelf in thoſe fooliſh and abominable idolatries, which were practiſed among the Heathen.

And is it not then a mighty advantage to us, that we have the clear and certain direction of divine revelation? We have the will of God plainly diſcovered to us, and all the parts of our duty clearly defined and determined, ſo that no man, that is in any meaſure free from intereſt and prejudice, can eaſily miſtake in any great and material part of his duty. We have the nature of God plainly revealed to us, and ſuch a character of him given, as is moſt ſuitable to our natural conceptions of a Deity, as render him both awful and amiable; for the ſcripture repreſents him to us as great and good, powerful and merciful, a perfect hater of ſin, and a great lover of mankind; and we have the law and manner of his worſhip, (ſo far as was needful) and the rules of a good life clearly expreſſed and laid down; and as a powerful motive and argument to the obedience of thoſe laws, a plain diſcovery made to us of the endleſs rewards and puniſhments of another world. And is not this a mighty advantage to the doing of God's will, to have it ſo plainly declared to us, and ſo powerfully enforced upon us? ſo that our duty lies plainly before us; we ſee what we have to do, and the danger of neglecting it; ſo that conſidering the advantage we have of doing God's will, by our clear knowledge of it, we are altogether inexcuſable if we do it not.

Secondly, The knowledge of our Lord's will is likewiſe a great obligation upon us to the doing of it. For what ought in reaſon to oblige us more to do any thing, than to be fully aſſured that it is the will of God, and that it is the law of the great Sovereign of the world, who is able to ſave, or to deſtroy? That it is the pleaſure of him that made us, and who hath declared that he deſigns to make us happy, by our obedience to his laws? So that if we know theſe things to be the will of God, we have the

the greateſt obligation to do them, whether we conſider the authority of God, or our own intereſt; and if we neglect them, we have nothing to ſay in our own excuſe. We know the law, and the advantage of keeping it, and the penalty of breaking it; and if after this we will tranſgreſs, there is no apology to be made for us. They have ſomething to plead for themſelves, who can ſay, that though they had ſome apprehenſion of ſome parts of their duty, and their minds were apt to dictate to them that they ought to do ſome things, yet the different apprehenſions of mankind about ſeveral of theſe things, and the doubts and uncertainties of their own minds concerning them, made them eaſy to be carried off from their duty, by the vicious inclinations of their own nature, and the tyranny of cuſtom and example, and the pleaſant temptations of fleſh and blood. But had they had a clear and undoubted revelation from God, and had certainly known theſe things to be his will, this would have conquered and born down all objections and temptations to the contrary; or, if it had not, would have ſtopt their mouths, and taken away all excuſe from them. There is ſome colour in this plea, that in many caſes they did not know certainly what the will of God was: But for us who own a clear revelation from God, and profeſs to believe it, what can we ſay for ourſelves, to mitigate the ſeverity of God towards us; why he ſhould not pour forth all his wrath, and execute upon us the fierceneſs of his anger?

Thirdly, The neglect of God's will, when we know it, cannot be without a great deal of wilfulneſs and contempt. If we know it, and do it not, the fault is ſolely in our wills; and the more wilful any ſin is, the more heinouſly wicked is it. There can hardly be a greater aggravation of a crime, than if it proceed from mere obſtinacy and perverſeneſs; and if we know it to be our Lord's will and do it not, we are guilty of the higheſt contempt of the greateſt authority in the world. And do we think this to be but a ſmall aggravation, to affront the

the great Sovereign and Judge of the world? not only to break his laws, but to trample upon them and deſpiſe them, when we know whoſe laws they are? *Will we provoke the Lord to jealouſy? Are we ſtronger than he?* We believe that it is God who ſaid, *Thou ſhalt not commit adultery; thou ſhalt not ſteal; thou ſhalt not bear falſe witneſs againſt thy neighbour; thou ſhalt not hate, or oppreſs, or defraud thy brother in any thing; but thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thyſelf*; and will we notwithſtanding venture to break theſe laws, knowing whoſe authority they are ſtampt withal? After this contempt of him, what favour can we hope for from him? What can we ſay for ourſelves, why any one of thoſe many ſtripes which are threatened ſhould be abated to us? *Ignoſci aliquatenus ignorantiæ poteſt; contemptus veniam non habet*; "Something may be pardoned "to ignorance; but contempt can expect no for-"giveneſs." He that ſtrikes his Prince, not knowing him to be ſo, hath ſomething to ſay for himſelf, that though he did a diſloyal act, yet it did not proceed from a diſloyal mind: but he that firſt acknowledgeth him for his Prince, and then affronts him, deſerves to be proſecuted with the utmoſt ſeverity, becauſe he did it wilfully, and in mere contempt. The knowledge of our duty, and that it is the will of God which we go againſt, takes away all poſſible excuſe from us; for nothing can be ſaid, why we ſhould offend him who hath both authority to command us, and power to deſtroy us.

And thus I have as briefly as I could, repreſented to you the true ground and reaſon of the aggravation of thoſe ſins, which are committed againſt the clear knowledge of God's will, and our duty; becauſe this knowledge is ſo great an advantage to the doing of our duty; ſo great an obligation upon us to it; and becauſe the neglect of our Lord's will in this caſe, cannot be without great wilfulneſs, and a downright contempt of his authority.

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And ſhall I now need to tell you how much it concerns every one of us, to live up to that knowledge which we have of our Lord's will, and to prepare ourſelves to do according to it? to be always in a readineſs and diſpoſition to do what we know to be his will, and actually to do it, when there is occaſion and opportunity? And it concerns us the more, becauſe we, in this age and nation, have ſo many advantages above a great part of the world, of coming to the knowledge of our duty. We enjoy the cleareſt and moſt perfect revelation which God ever made of his will to mankind, and have the light of divine truth plentifully ſhed amongſt us, by the free uſe of the holy ſcriptures, which is not a ſealed book to us, but lies open to be read, and ſtudied by us. This ſpiritual food is rained down like manna round about our tents; and every one may gather ſo much as is ſufficient; we are not ſtinted, nor have the word of God given out to us in broken pieces, or mixt and adulterated, here a leſſon of ſcripture, and there a legend; but whole and entire, ſincere and incorrupt.

God hath not left us, as he did the Heathen for many ages, to the imperfect and uncertain direction of natural light; nor hath he revealed his will to us, as he did to the Jews, in dark types and ſhadows: But hath made a clear diſcovery of his mind and will to us. The diſpenſation which we are under, hath no veil upon it, *the darkneſs is paſt, and the true light now ſhineth*; *we are of the day, and of the light*, and therefore it may juſtly be expected that we ſhould *put off the works of darkneſs, and walk as children of the light*. Every degree of knowledge which we have, is an aggravation of the ſins committed againſt it, and, when our Lord comes to paſs ſentence upon us, will add to the number of our ſtripes. Nay, if God ſhould inflict no poſitive torment upon ſinners; yet their own minds would deal moſt ſeverely with them upon this account: and nothing will gall their conſciences more, than to remember againſt what light they did offend. For herein lies the very nature and ſting of all guilt, to be conſcious

ous to ourſelves, that we knew what we ought to have done, and did it not. The vices and corruptions which reigned in the world before, will be pardonable, in compariſon of ours. *The times of* that *ignorance God winked at; but now he commands all men every where to repent.* Mankind had ſome excuſe for their errors before, and God was pleaſed in a great meaſure to overlook them; but if we continue ſtill in our ſins, we *have no cloak for* them. All the degrees of light which we enjoy, are ſo many talents committed to us by our Lord, for the improving whereof, he will call us to a ſtrict account; *for unto whomſoever much is given, of him much ſhall be required; and to whom he hath committed much, of him he will ask the more.* And nothing is more reaſonable, than that men ſhould account for all the advantages and opportunities they have had of knowing the will of God; and that as their knowledge was increaſed, ſo their ſorrow and puniſhment ſhould propottionably riſe, if they ſin againſt it. The ignorance of a great part of the world is deſervedly pitied and lamented by us; but the condemnation of none is ſo ſad, as of thoſe who having the knowledge of God's will, neglected to do it. How much *better had it been for them not to have known the way of righteouſneſs, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them!* If we had been born, and brought up in ignorance of the true God and his will, we *had had no ſin,* in compariſon of what now we have: But now *that we ſee, our ſin remains.* This will aggravate our condemnation beyond meaſure, that we had the knowledge of ſalvation ſo clearly revealed to us. Our duty lies plainly before us: we know what we ought to do, and *what manner of perſons we ought to be, in all holy converſation and godlineſs.* We believe the coming of our Lord to judgment, and we know not how ſoon he may be *revealed from heaven with his mighty Angels,* not *only to take vengeance on them that know not God,* but on them that have known him, and yet *obey not the goſpel of his Son.* And if all this will not move

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us to prepare ourſelves to do our Lord's will, we deſerve to have our ſtripes multiplied. No condemnation can be too heavy for thoſe who offend againſt the clear knowledge of God's will, and their duty.

Let us then be perſuaded to ſet upon the practice of what we know; let the light which is in our underſtandings, deſcend upon our hearts and lives; let us not dare to continue any longer in the practice of any known ſin, nor in the neglect of any thing which we are convinced is our duty; and *if our hearts condemn us not*, neither for the neglect of the means of knowledge, nor for rebelling againſt the light of God's truth ſhining in our minds, and glaring upon our conſciences, *then have we confidence towards God: but if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and knows all things.*

SERMON CXV.

The ſins of men not chargeable upon God; but upon themſelves.

JAMES i. 13, 14.

Let no man ſay, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when is he drawn away of his own luſt, and enticed.

The firſt ſermon on this text.

NEXT to the belief of a God, and his providence, there is nothing more fundamentally neceſſary than the belief of theſe two principles, *That God is not the author of ſin*; and *that*

every man's ſin lies at his own door, and he hath reaſon to blame himſelf for all the evil that he does.

Firſt, That *God is not the author of ſin*, that he is no way acceſſary to our faults, either by tempting or forcing us to the commiſſion of them. For if he were, they would neither properly be ſins, nor could they be juſtly puniſhed. They would not properly be ſins, for ſin is a contradiction to the will of God; but ſuppoſing men to be either tempted, or neceſſitated thereto, that which we call ſin would either be a mere paſſive obedience to the will of God, or an active compliance with it, but neither way a contradiction to it. Nor could theſe actions be juſtly puniſhed; for all puniſhment ſuppoſeth a fault, and a fault ſuppoſeth liberty and freedom from force and neceſſity; ſo that no man can be juſtly puniſhed for that which he cannot help, and no man can help that which he is neceſſitated and compelled to. And though there were no force in the caſe, but only temptation, yet it would be unreaſonable for the ſame perſon to tempt and puniſh. For as nothing is more contrary to the holineſs of God, than to tempt men to ſin; ſo nothing can be more againſt juſtice and goodneſs, than firſt to draw men into a fault, and then to chaſtiſe them for it. So that this is a principle which lies at the bottom of all religion, *That God is not the author of the ſins of men.* And then,

Secondly, *That every man's fault lies at his own door, and he has reaſon enough to blame himſelf for all the evil that he does.* And this is that which makes men properly guilty, that when they have done amiſs, they are conſcious to themſelves it was their own act, and they might have done otherwiſe; and guilt is that which makes men liable to puniſhment; and fear of puniſhment is the great reſtraint from ſin, and one of the principal arguments for virtue and obedience.

And both theſe principles our Apoſtle St. James does here fully aſſert in the words which I have read unto you: *Let no man ſay, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil,*

evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own luſt, and enticed.

In which words theſe two things are plainly contained:

Firſt, That God doth not tempt any man to ſin. *Let no man ſay, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.*

Secondly, That every man's fault lies at his own door, and he is his own greateſt tempter. *But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own luſt, and enticed.*

I. That God doth not tempt any man to ſin. *Let no man ſay, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.* In which words there are three things to be conſidered:

1 *Firſt*, The propoſition which the Apoſtle here rejects, and that is, That God tempts men. *Let no man ſay, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God.*

Secondly, The manner in which he rejects it. *Let no man ſay* ſo. By which manner of ſpeaking, the Apoſtle inſinuates theſe two things: 1. That men are apt to lay their faults upon God; for when he ſays, *Let no man ſay* ſo, he intimates, that men are apt to ſay ſo, and it is very probable that ſome did ſay ſo; and 2*dly*, That it is not only a fault, but an impious aſſertion to ſay that God tempts men. He ſpeaks of it as a thing to be rejected with deteſtation. *Let no man ſay*; that is, far be it from us to affirm a thing ſo impious and diſhonourable to God.

Thirdly, The reaſon and argument that he brings againſt it; *for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.*

Firſt, The propoſition which the Apoſtle here rejects, and that is, That God tempts men: *Let no man ſay, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God.* Now, that we may the more diſtinctly underſtand the meaning of the propoſition which the Apoſtle here rejects, it will be very requiſite to conſider

what temptation is, and the ſeveral ſorts and kinds of it. To tempt a man, is, in general, nothing elſe but to make trial of him in any kind what he will do. In ſcripture, *temptation* is commonly confined to the trial of a man's good or bad, of his virtuous or vicious inclinations. But then it is ſuch a trial as endangers a man's virtue, and if he be not well reſolved, is likely to overcome it, and to make him fall into ſin. So that temptation does always imply ſomething of danger the worſt way. And men are thus tempted, either from themſelves, or by others; by others chiefly theſe two ways:

Firſt, By direct and downright perſuaſions to ſin.

Secondly, By being brought into ſuch circumſtances as will greatly endanger their falling into it, though none ſollicit and perſuade them to it.

Firſt, By direct and downright perſuaſions to ſin. Thus the Devil tempted our firſt parents, by repreſenting things ſo to them, as might on the one hand incite them to ſin, and on the other hand weaken and looſen that which was the great curb and reſtraint from it. On the one hand he repreſents to them the advantages they ſhould have by breaking God's command. *God doth know, that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes ſhall be opened; and ye ſhall be as gods, knowing good and evil.* On the other hand, he repreſents the danger of offending not to be ſo great and certain as they imagined. *The Serpent ſaid unto the woman, Ye ſhall not ſurely dy.* And the Devil had ſo good ſucceſs in this way of tempting the firſt Adam, as to encourage him to ſet upon the ſecond, our bleſſed Saviour, in the ſame manner; for he would have perſuaded him to fall down and worſhip him, by offering him *all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them.* And thus bad men many times tempt others, and endeavour to draw them into the ſame wicked courſes with themſelves. Solomon repreſents to us the manner and the danger of it, Prov. i. 10, 11, 12, 13, 14. *My ſon, if ſinners entice thee, conſent thou not; if they ſay, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cauſe; we ſhall find all*

all precious ſubſtance, we ſhall fill our houſes with ſpoil. Caſt in thy lot amongſt us, let us all have one purſe. This is the firſt way of tempation.

And to be ſure God tempts no man this way. He offers no arguments to man to perſuade him to ſin; he no where propoſeth either reward or impunity to ſinners; but on the contrary gives all imaginable encouragement to obedience, and threatens the tranſgreſſion of his law with moſt dreadful puniſhments.

Secondly, Men are likewiſe tempted, by being brought into ſuch circumſtances, as will greatly endanger their falling into ſin, though none perſuade them to it; and this happens two ways: When men are remarkably beſet with the allurements of the world, or aſſaulted with the evils and calamities of it; for either of theſe conditions are great temptations to men, and make powerful aſſaults upon them, eſpecially when they fall upon thoſe who are ill diſpoſed before, or are but of a weak virtue and reſolution.

The allurements of the world are ſtrong temptations; riches, honours and pleaſures, are the occaſions and incentives to many luſts. Honour and greatneſs, power and authority over others, eſpecially when men are ſuddenly lifted up, and from a low condition, are apt to tranſport men to pride and inſolency towards others. Power is a ſtrong liquor which does eaſily intoxicate weak minds, and make them apt to ſay and do indecent things. *Man that is in honour and underſtandeth not, is like the beaſts that periſh*; intimating, that men who are exalted to an high condition, are very apt to forget themſelves, and to play the fools and beaſts. It requires great conſideration, and a well poiſed mind, not to be lifted up with one's condition. Weak heads are apt to turn and grow dizzy, when they look down from a great height.

And ſo likewiſe eaſe and proſperity are a very ſlippery condition to moſt men, and without great care, do endanger the falling into great ſins. So Solomon obſerves, Prov. i. 32. *For the turning away of*

the ſimple ſhall ſlay them, and the proſperity of fools ſhall deſtroy them. For this reaſon Agur maketh his prayer to God, that he would *give him neither poverty nor riches*, but keep him in a mean condition, becauſe of the danger of both extremes, Prov. xxx. 8, 9. *Give me not riches, leſt I be full and deny thee.* Both the eager deſire, and the poſſeſſion and enjoyment of riches, do frequently prove fatal to men. So our Saviour tells us elſewhere very emphatically, Matth. xix. 23, 24. *Verily I ſay unto you, that a rich man ſhall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven: And again I ſay unto you, it is eaſier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.* St. Paul likewiſe very fully declares unto us the great danger of this condition, 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10. *But they that will be rich, fall into temptation, and a ſnare, and into many fooliſh and hurtful luſts, which drown men in deſtruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil; which while ſome coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themſelves through with many ſorrows.*

But the greateſt bait of all to fleſh and blood is ſenſual pleaſures; the very preſence and opportunity of theſe, are apt to kindle the deſires, and to inflame the luſts of men, eſpecially where theſe temptations meet with ſuitable tempers, where every ſpark that falls catcheth.

And on the other hand, the evils and calamities of this world, eſpecially if they threaten or fall upon men in any degree of extremity, are ſtrong temptations to human nature. Poverty and want, pain and ſuffering, and the fear of any great evil, eſpecially of death, theſe are great ſtraits to human nature, and apt to tempt men to great ſins, to impatience and diſcontent, to unjuſt and diſhoneſt ſhifts, to the forſaking of God, and apoſtaſy from his truth and religion. Agur was ſenſible of the dangerous temptation of poverty, and therefore he prays againſt that, as well as againſt riches; *give me not poverty, leſt being poor I ſteal, and take the name of the Lord my God in vain*; that is, leſt I be tempted to theft and per-

perjury. The Devil, whose trade is to tempt men to sin, knew very well the force of these sorts of temptations, when he desires God first to touch Job in his estate, and to see what effect that would have, Job i. 11. *But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face.* And when he found himself deceived in this, surely he thought, that were he but afflicted with great bodily pains, that would put him out of all patience, and flesh and blood would not be able to withstand this temptation, chap. ii. 5. *But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face.* And this was the great temptation that the primitive Christians were assaulted withal; they were tempted to forsake Christ and his religion by a most violent persecution, by the spoiling of their goods, by imprisonment, and torture, and death. And this is that kind of temptation which the Apostle particularly speaks of before the text, *Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him*; and then it follows, *Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God.* And thus I have given an account of the several sorts of temptations comprehended under this second head, namely, when men are tempted by being brought into such circumstances as do greatly endanger their falling into sin, by the allurements of this world, and by the evils and calamities of it.

Now the question is, how far God hath an hand in these kind of temptations, that so we may know how to limit this proposition, which the Apostle here rejects, that men are tempted of God: *Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God.*

That the providence of God does order, or at least permit men to be brought into these circumstances I have spoken of, which are such dangerous temptations to sin, no man can doubt, that believes his providence to be concerned in the affairs of the world. All the difficulty is, how far the Apostle does here intend to exempt God from an hand in

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theſe temptations. Now, for the clearer underſtanding of this, it will be requiſite to conſider the ſeveral ends and reaſons, which thoſe who tempt others may have in tempting them; and all temptation is for one of theſe three ends or reaſons: either for the trial and improvement of mens virtues; or by way of judgment and puniſhment for ſome former great ſins and provocations; or with a direct purpoſe and deſign to ſeduce men to ſin. Theſe, I think, are the chief ends and reaſons that can be imagined, of exerciſing men with dangerous temptations.

Firſt, For the exerciſe and improvement of mens graces and virtues. And this is the end which God always aims at, in bringing good men, or permitting them to be brought into dangerous temptations. And therefore St. James ſpeaks of it as a matter of joy, when good men are exerciſed with afflictions; not becauſe afflictions are deſirable for themſelves, but becauſe of the happy conſequences of them, ver. 2, 3, of this chapter, *My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.* And to the ſame purpoſe St. Paul, Rom. v. 3, 4, 5. *We glory in tribulation, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, δοκιμὴ*, patience trieth a man, *and this trial worketh hope, and hope maketh not aſhamed.* Theſe are happy effects and conſequences of affliction and ſuffering, when they improve the virtues of men and increaſe their graces, and thereby make way for the increaſe of their glory. Upon this account St. James pronounceth thoſe bleſſed, who are thus tempted. *Bleſſed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he ſhall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promiſed to them that love him.*

And this certainly is no diſparagement to the providence of God, to permit men to be thus tempted, when he permits it for no other end, but to make them better men, and thereby to prepare them for a greater reward: And ſo the Apoſtle aſſures us, Rom. viii. 17, 18. *If ſo be we ſuffer with him, we ſhall*

ſhall alſo be glorified with him; for I reckon that the ſufferings of this preſent time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that ſhall be revealed in us. And ver. 28. *For we know that all things ſhall work together for good to them that love God.* And this happy end and iſſue of temptations to good men the providence of God ſecures to them (if they be not wanting to themſelves) one of theſe two ways, either by proportioning the temptation to their ſtrength; or, if it exceed that, by miniſtring new ſtrength and ſupport to them, by the ſecret and extraordinary aids of his Holy Spirit.

Firſt, By proportioning the temptation to their ſtrength; ordering things ſo by his ſecret and wiſe providence, that they ſhall not be aſſaulted by any temptation, which is beyond their ſtrength to reſiſt and overcome. And herein the ſecurity of good men doth ordinarily conſiſt; and the very beſt of us, thoſe who have the firmeſt and moſt reſolute virtue, were in infinite danger, if the providence of God did not take this care of us. For a temptation may ſet upon the beſt men with ſo much violence, or ſurprize them at ſuch an advantage, as no ordinary degree of grace and virtue is able to withſtand: But where men are ſincerely good, and honeſtly reſolved, the providence of God doth ward off theſe fierce blows, and put by theſe violent thruſts, and by a ſecret diſpoſal of things, keep them from being aſſaulted by theſe irreſiſtible kinds of temptations.

The conſideration whereof, as it is a great encouragement to men to be ſincerely good, ſo likewiſe a great argument for a continual dependence upon the providence of God, and to take us off from confidence in ourſelves, and our own ſtrength. And this uſe the Apoſtle makes of it, 1 Cor. x. 12. *Wherefore let him that thinketh he ſtandeth*, (that is confident that nothing ſhall be able to ſhake him, or throw him down) *take heed leſt he fall. There hath no temptation taken you, but ſuch as is common to men*; εἰ μὴ ἀνθρώπινος, *but what is human*; nothing but what an human ſtrength, aſſiſted by an ordinary grace of God,

God, may be able to reſiſt and conquer. But there are greater and more violent temptations than theſe, which you have not yet been tried with; and when thoſe happen, we muſt have recourſe to God for an extraordinary aſſiſtance. And this is the

Second way I mentioned, whereby the providence of God does ſecure good men, in caſe of extraordinary temptations, which no human ſtrength can probably reſiſt. And this the ſame Apoſtle aſſures us of in the very next words, *God is faithful, who will not ſuffer you to be tempted above what you are able, but will with the temptation alſo make a way to eſcape, that you may be able to bear it.* That is, in caſe of great and violent temptations (ſuch as the Chriſtians in the height of their perſecutions were expoſed to) God will ſecretly miniſter ſtrength and ſupport equal to the force and power of the temptation. And this God did in an extraordinary manner to the Chriſtian martyrs, and that to ſuch a degree, as made them joyfully to embrace their ſufferings, and with the greateſt chearfulneſs in the world, to endure thoſe torments, which no human patience was able to bear. And where God doth thus ſecure men againſt temptations, or ſupport them under them, it is no reflexion at all upon the goodneſs or juſtice of his providence, to permit them to be thus tempted.

Secondly, God permits others to be thus tempted, by way of judgment and puniſhment for ſome former great ſins and provocations which they have been guilty of. And thus many times God puniſheth great and notorious offenders, by permitting them to fall into great temptations; which meeting with a vicious diſpoſition, are likely to be too hard for them, eſpecially conſidering, how by a long habit of wickedneſs, and wilful commiſſion of great and notorious ſins, they have made themſelves an eaſy prey to every temptation, and have driven the Spirit of God from them, and deprived themſelves of thoſe aids and reſtraints of his grace, which he ordinarily affords, not only to good men, but likewiſe to thoſe who are not very bad. And thus God is ſaid to have hardened Pharaoh by thoſe plagues and

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judgments which he ſent upon him and his kingdom. But if we carefully read the ſtory, it is ſaid that *he firſt hardened himſelf*, and then that *God hardened him*; that is, he being hardened under the firſt judgments of God, God ſent more, which meeting with his obſtinacy, had this natural effect upon him, to harden him yet more; not that God did infuſe any wickedneſs or obſtinacy into him, but by his juſt judgments ſent more plagues upon him, which hardened him yet more, and which were likely to have that effect upon him, conſidering the ill temper of the man. And it was juſt by way of puniſhment that they ſhould. And ſo likewiſe, Joſhua xi. 19, 20. it is ſaid that the cities of the Canaanites did not make peace with Joſhua, becauſe *it was of the Lord, to harden their hearts, that they ſhould come againſt Iſrael in battle, that he might deſtroy them utterly*; that is, for their former iniquities, the meaſure whereof was now full, the providence of God did juſtly bring them into, and leave them under thoſe circumſtances, which made them obſtinate againſt all terms of peace, and this proved fatal to them.

And in the like ſenſe we are to underſtand ſeveral other expreſſions in ſcripture which likewiſe might ſeem very harſh. As Iſaiah vi. 10. *Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and ſhut their eyes, leſt they ſee with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and underſtand with their hearts, and convert, and be healed*; all which expreſſions ſignify no more, but that God, for the former provocations and impenitency of that people, did leave them to their own hardneſs and blindneſs; ſo that they did not deſire to underſtand and make uſe of the means of their recovery. So likewiſe, Rom. i. 24. God is ſaid to have given up the idolatrous Heathen *to uncleanneſs, to vile and unnatural luſts*; and ver. 28. *to a reprobate and injudicious mind*; that is, as a puniſhment of their idolatry, he left them to the power of thoſe temptations, which betrayed them to the vileſt luſts. And to mention but one text more, 2 Theſſ. ii. 11. the Apoſtle threatens thoſe that rejected the truth, that *for this cauſe God would ſend them ſtrong*

deluſions

deluſions (the efficacy of error) *that they ſhould believe a lie, and that they all might be damned, who believed not the truth, but had pleaſure in unrighteouſneſs*; that is, as a juſt puniſhment for their renouncing the truth, God gave them over to the power of deluſion; their error had its full ſcope at them, to tempt them with all its colours and pretences.

But it is obſervable, that in all theſe places which I have mentioned, God is ſaid to give men up to the power of temptation, as a puniſhment of ſome former great crimes and provocations. And it is not unjuſt with God thus to deal with men, to leave them to the power of temptation, when they had firſt wilfully forſaken him; and in this caſe God doth not tempt men to ſin, but leaves them to themſelves, to be tempted by their own hearts luſts; and if they yield and are conquered, it is their own fault, becauſe they have neglected God's grace, whereby they might have been able to have reſiſted thoſe temptations; and have forced his Holy Spirit to withdraw himſelf from them, and to leave them open and naked to thoſe aſſaults of temptation, againſt which they might otherwiſe have been ſufficiently armed.

Thirdly, The laſt end of temptation which I mentioned, is to try men, with a direct purpoſe and intention to ſeduce men to ſin. Thus wicked men tempt others, and thus the Devil tempts men. Thus he tempted our firſt parents, and ſeduced them from their obedience and allegiance to God. Thus he tempted Job by bringing him into thoſe circumſtances, which were very likely to have forced him into impatience and diſcontent. And thus he tempted our bleſſed Saviour; but *found nothing in him* to work upon, or to give him any advantage over him. And thus he daily tempts men, by laying all ſorts of baits and ſnares before them, *going about continually ſeeking whom he may* ſeduce and *deſtroy*; and as far as God permits him, and his power reacheth, he ſuits his temptations as near as he can to the humours and appetites and inclinations of men, contriving them into ſuch circumſtances, as that he may ply his temptations upon them to the greateſt advantage;

tage; propounding ſuch objects to them, as may moſt probably draw forth the corruptions of men, and kindle their irregular deſires, and inflame their luſts, and tempt their evil inclinations that way, which they are moſt ſtrongly bent. He tempts the covetous man with gain, the ambitious man with preferment, the voluptuous man with carnal and ſenſual pleaſures; and where none of theſe baits will take, he ſtirs up his inſtruments to perſecute thoſe who are ſtedfaſt and confirmed in reſolutions of piety and virtue, to try if he can work upon their fear, and ſhake their conſtancy and fidelity to God and goodneſs that way; and all this he doth with a direct deſign and earneſt deſire to ſeduce men from their duty, and to betray them to ſin.

But thus *God tempts no man:* and in this ſenſe it is that the Apoſtle means, that *no man when he is tempted, is tempted of God.* God hath no deſign to ſeduce any man to ſin. He often proves the obedience of men, and ſuffers them to *fall into divers temptations,* for *the trial of their faith,* and exerciſe of their obedience and other virtues; and he permits bad men to be aſſaulted with great temptations, and, as a puniſhment of their former obſtinacy and impiety, withdraws the aids and aſſiſtances of his grace from them, and leaves them to their own weakneſs and folly; but not ſo as to take away all reſtraint of his grace even from bad men, unleſs it be upon very high provocation, and a long and obſtinate continuance in ſin: But God never tempts any man, with any intention to ſeduce him to ſin, and with a deſire he ſhould do wickedly. This is the proper work of the Devil and his inſtruments; in this ſenſe it is far from God to tempt any man; and whenever in the ordinary courſe, and by the common permiſſion of his providence, men *fall into temptation,* the utmoſt that God does, is to leave them to themſelves; and he does not do this neither, but to thoſe who have highly provoked him to depart from them, that is, to thoſe who have juſtly deſerved to be ſo dealt withal.

And thus I have conſidered the propoſition which the Apoſtle here rejects, namely, *that God tempts men*, and have ſhewn as clearly as I can, how it is to be limited and underſtood. I now proceed to the ſecond thing which I propounded to conſider, *viz.* The manner in which the Apoſtle rejects this propoſition, *Let no man ſay, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God.* By which manner of ſpeaking, he inſinuates two things:

Firſt, That men are apt to lay their faults upon God. For when he ſays, *Let no man ſay* ſo, he intimates that men were apt to ſay thus; and it is probable ſome did ſay ſo, to excuſe themſelves for their deſerting their religion upon the temptation of perſecution and ſuffering. It is not unlikely that men might lay the fault upon God's providence, which expoſed them to theſe difficult trials, and thereby tempted them to forſake their religion.

But however this be, we find it very natural to men, to transfer their faults upon others. Men are naturally ſenſible when they offend, and do contrary to their duty; and the guilt of ſin is an heavy burden, of which men would be glad to eaſe themſelves as much as they can; and they think it is a mitigation and excuſe of their faults if they did not proceed only from themſelves, but from the violence and compulſion, the temptation and inſtigation of others. But eſpecially men are very glad to lay their faults upon God, becauſe he is a full and ſufficient excuſe, nothing being to be blamed that comes from him. Thus Adam did, upon the commiſſion of the very firſt ſin that mankind was guilty of. When God charged him for breaking of his law, by eating of the fruit of the forbidden tree, he endeavours to excuſe himſelf by laying the fault obliquely upon God; *The woman whom thou gaveſt to be with me, ſhe gave me of the tree, and I did eat. The woman whom thou gaveſt to be with me*; he does what he can to derive the fault upon God. And though this be very unreaſonable, yet it ſeems it is very natural. Men would fain have the pleaſure of committing ſin, but then they would be glad to remove

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as much of the trouble and guilt of it from themſelves as they can.

Secondly, This manner of ſpeech which the Apoſtle here uſeth, doth inſinuate further to us, that it is not only a falſe, but an impious aſſertion to ſay that God tempts men to ſin. He ſpeaks of it, not only as a thing unfit to be ſaid, but fit to be rejected with the greateſt indignation; *let no man ſay*, that is, far be it from us to affirm any thing ſo impious and ſo diſhonourable to God. For nothing can be more contrary to the holy and righteous nature of God, and to thoſe plain declarations which he hath made of himſelf, than to ſeduce men to wickedneſs; and therefore no man, that hath any regard to the honour of God, can entertain the leaſt ſuſpicion of his having any hand in the ſins of men, or give heed to any principles or doctrines, from whence ſo odious and abominable a conſequence may be drawn. I proceed to the

Third thing I propounded to conſider, *viz.* The reaſon or argument which the Apoſtle brings againſt this impious ſuggeſtion; *That God cannot be tempted with evil*, and therefore no man can imagine that he ſhould tempt any man to it; *Let no man ſay, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.* And in ſpeaking to this, I ſhall

Firſt, Conſider the ſtrength and force of this argument; And

Secondly, The nature and kind of it.

Firſt, The ſtrength and force of this argument, *God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man*; ἀπείραστος ἐστὶ κακῶν; *he is untemptable by evil*; he cannot be drawn to any thing that is bad himſelf, and therefore it cannot be imagined he ſhould have any inclination or deſign to ſeduce others. And this will appear to be a ſtrong and forcible argument, if we conſider,

Firſt, The propoſition upon which it is grounded, *that God cannot be tempted by evil.*

Secondly, The conſequence that clearly follows from it; and that is, that becauſe God cannot be

tempted by evil, therefore *he cannot tempt any man to it.*

Firſt, We will conſider the propoſition upon which this argument is built, and that is, *that God cannot be tempted by evil.* He is out of the reach of any temptation to evil. Whoever is tempted to any thing, is either tempted by his own inclination, or by the allurement of the object, or by ſome external motive and conſideration: but none of all theſe can be imagined to have any place in God, to tempt him to evil.

For, *firſt*, he hath no temptation to it from his own inclination. The holy and pure nature of God is at the greateſt diſtance from evil, and at the greateſt contrariety to it. He is ſo far from having any inclination to evil, that it is the only thing in the world to which he hath an irreconcileable antipathy. This the ſcripture frequently declares to us, and that in a very emphatical manner, Pſal. v. 4. *He is not a God that hath pleaſure in wickedneſs, neither ſhall evil dwell with him.* The words are a diminution, and leſs is ſaid than is intended by them; the meaning is, that God is ſo far from taking pleaſure in ſin, that he hath a perfect hatred and abhorrence of it, Hab. ii. 13. *Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canſt not look upon iniquity.* As when men hate a thing to the higheſt degree, they turn away their eyes, and cannot endure to look upon it. Light and darkneſs are not more oppoſite to one another, than the holy nature of God is to ſin. *What fellowſhip hath light with darkneſs, or God with Belial?*

Secondly, There is no allurement in the object, to ſtir up any inclination in him towards it. Sin in its very nature is imperfection, and irregularity, crookedneſs and deformity; ſo that unleſs there be an inclination to it before-hand, there is nothing in it to move any one's liking or deſire towards it; it hath no attractives or enticements in it, but to a corrupt and ill-diſpoſed mind.

Thirdly, Neither are there external motives and conſiderations, that can be imagined to tempt God to it. All arguments that have any temptation, are either founded in hope or in fear; either in the hope

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of gaining ſome benefit or advantage, or in the fear of falling into ſome miſchief or inconvenience. Now the divine nature being perfectly happy, and perfectly ſecured in its own happineſs, is out of the reach of any of theſe temptations. Men are many times tempted to evil very ſtrongly by theſe conſiderations; they want many things to make them happy, and they fear many things which may make them miſerable; and the hopes of the one, and the fears of the other, are apt to work very powerfully upon them, to ſeduce them from their duty, and to draw them to ſin: but the divine nature is firm againſt all theſe attempts, by its own fulneſs and ſecurity. So that you ſee now the propoſition, upon which the Apoſtle grounds his argument, is evidently true, and beyond all exception, *that God cannot be tempted with evil.* Let us then in the

Second place, conſider the conſequence that clearly follows from it, that becauſe God cannot be tempted with evil, *therefore he cannot tempt any man to it.* For why ſhould he deſire to draw men into that, which he himſelf abhors, and which is ſo contrary to his own nature and diſpoſition? When men tempt one another to ſin, they do it to make others like themſelves; and when the Devil tempts men to ſin, it is either out of direct malice to God, or out of envy to men. But none of theſe conſiderations can have any place in God, or be any motive to him to tempt men to ſin.

Bad men tempt others to ſin, to make them like themſelves, and that with one of theſe two deſigns; either for the comfort or pleaſure of company, or for the countenance of it, that there may be ſome kind of apology and excuſe for them.

For the comfort and pleaſure of company. Man does not love to be alone; and for this reaſon bad men endeavour to make others like themſelves, that agreeing with them in the ſame diſpoſition and manners, they may be fit company for them. For no man takes pleaſure in the ſociety and converſation of thoſe, who are of contrary tempers and inclinations to them, becauſe they are continually warring

and claſhing with one another. And for this reaſon bad men hate and perſecute thoſe that are good: *Let us ly in wait* (ſay they) *for the righteous, becauſe he is not for our turn, and he is contrary to our doings; he is grievous unto us even to behold; for his life is not like other mens, and his ways are of another faſhion;* as it is expreſſed in the Wiſdom of Solomon. So that wicked men tempt others to ſin, that they may have the pleaſure and contentment of their ſociety. But now for this reaſon God cannot be imagined to tempt men to ſin; becauſe that would be the way to make them unlike himſelf, and ſuch as his ſoul could take no pleaſure in.

Another deſign that bad men have in ſeducing others to ſin, is thereby to give countenance to their bad actions, and to be ſome kind of excuſe and apology for them. Among men, the multitude of offenders does ſometimes procure impunity, but it always gives countenance to vice; and men are apt to alledge it in their excuſe, that they are not alone guilty of ſuch a fault, that they did not do it without company and example; which is the reaſon of that law, Exod. xxiii. 2. *Thou ſhalt not follow a multitude to do evil*; implying, that men are very apt to take encouragement to any thing that is bad, from company and example. But neither hath this reaſon any place in God, who being far from doing evil himſelf, can have no reaſon to tempt others to do ſo, by way of excuſe and vindication of himſelf.

And when the Devil tempts men to ſin, it is either out of direct malice to God, or out of envy to men. Out of malice to God, to ſpoil his workmanſhip, and to pervert that which came innocent and upright out of his hands; to rob God of his ſubjects, and to debauch them from their duty and allegiance to him; to ſtrengthen the rebellion which he has raiſed againſt God, and to make him as many enemies as he can. But for this end God cannot tempt any man; for this would be to procure diſhonour to himſelf, and to deface the work of his own hands.

Another reaſon why the Devil tempts men, is envy. When he was fallen from God, and happineſs, and

and by his own rebellion had made himſelf miſerable, he was diſcontented to ſee the happy condition of man, and *it grieved him at his very heart*; and this moved him to tempt man to ſin, that he might involve him in the ſame miſery into which he had plunged himſelf. It is a pleaſure to envy to overturn the happineſs of others, and to lay them level with themſelves. But the divine nature is full of goodneſs, and delights in the happineſs of all his creatures. His own incomparable felicity has placed him as much above any temptation to envying others, as above any occaſion of being contemned by them. He grudges no man's happineſs, and therefore cannot tempt men to ſin, out of a deſire to ſee them miſerable. So that none of thoſe conſiderations which move the Devil to tempt men to ſin, and evil men to tempt one another to do wickedly, can be imagined to have any place in God.

And thus you ſee the force of the Apoſtle's argument, that becauſe *God cannot be tempted to evil*, therefore *he can tempt no man*. None tempt others to be bad, but thoſe who are firſt ſo themſelves. I ſhall now, in the

Second place, conſider the nature and kind of the argument, which the Apoſtle here uſeth, *Let no man ſay, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man*. He does not reject this impious propoſition barely upon his own authority; but he argues againſt it from the nature and perfection of God; and therein appeals to the common notions of mankind concerning God. We might very well have reſted in his authority, being an Apoſtle commiſſioned by our Saviour, and extraordinarily aſſiſted and witneſſed to, by the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghoſt, wherewith he was endowed. But he condeſcends to give a reaſon of what he ſays, and appeals to the common principles of mankind. For all men will readily agree to this, *that God hath all imaginable perfection*: but it is a plain imperfection to be liable to be tempted to evil, and therefore *God cannot be tempted to evil*. And if ſo, it is as impoſſible

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that he ſhould tempt others to it; for none can have either an inclination or intereſt to ſeduce others to evil, but thoſe who have been firſt ſeduced to it themſelves.

Now in this method of arguing, the Apoſtle teacheth us one of the ſureſt ways of reaſoning in religion; namely, from the natural notions which men have of God. So that all doctrines plainly contrary to thoſe natural notions which men have of God, are to be rejected, what authority ſoever they pretend to; whatever plainly derogates from the goodneſs or juſtice of God, or any other of his perfections, is certainly falſe, what authority ſoever it may claim from the judgment of learned and pious men; yea though it pretend to be countenanced from the texts and expreſſions of holy ſcripture. Becauſe nothing can be entertained as a divine revelation, which plainly contradicts the common natural notions which mankind have of God. For all reaſoning about divine revelation, and whether that which pretends to be ſo, be really ſo or not, is to be governed by thoſe natural notions. And if any thing that pretends to be a revelation from God, ſhould teach men that there is no God, or that he is not wiſe and good, and juſt, and powerful; this is reaſon enough to reject it, how confident ſoever the pretence be, that it is a divine revelation.

And if any thing be, upon good grounds in reaſon, received for a divine revelation (as the holy ſcriptures are amongſt Chriſtians) no man ought to be regarded, who from thence pretends to maintain any doctrine contrary to the natural notions which men have of God; ſuch as clearly contradict his holineſs or goodneſs, or juſtice, or do by plain and undeniable conſequence make God the author of ſin, or the like; becauſe the very attempt to prove any ſuch thing out of the ſcripture, does ſtrike at the divine authority of thoſe books. For if they be from God, it is certain they can contain no ſuch thing. So that no man ought to ſuffer himſelf to be ſeduced into any ſuch opinions, upon pretence that there are expreſſions in ſcripture which ſeem to coun-

countenance them. For if they really did ſo, the conſequence would not be the confirming of ſuch opinions; but the weakening of the authority of the ſcripture itſelf. For juſt ſo many arguments as any man can draw from ſcripture for any ſuch opinion, ſo many weapons he puts into the hands of Atheiſts againſt the ſcripture itſelf.

I do not ſpeak this, as if I thought there were any ground from ſcripture for any ſuch doctrine; I am very certain there is not. And if there be any particular expreſſions, which to prejudiced men may ſeem to import any ſuch thing, every man ought to govern himſelf in the interpretation of ſuch paſſages, by what is clear and plain, and agreeable to the main ſcope and tenor of the bible, and to thoſe natural notions which men have of God, and of his perfections. For when all is done, this is one of the ſureſt ways of reaſoning in religion; and whoever guides himſelf, and ſteers by this compaſs, can never err much: but whoever ſuffers himſelf to be led away by the appearance of ſome more obſcure phraſes in the expreſſions of ſcripture, and the gloſſes of men upon them, without regard to this rule, may run into the greateſt deluſions, may wander eternally, and loſe himſelf in one miſtake after another, and ſhall never find his way out of this endleſs labyrinth, but by this clue.

If St. James had not been an Apoſtle, the argument which he uſed would have convinced any reaſonable man, *that God tempts no man to ſin,* becauſe *he cannot be tempted with evil himſelf,* and therefore it is unreaſonable to imagine he ſhould tempt any man. For he argues from ſuch a principle, as all mankind will, at firſt hearing, aſſent to.

And thus I have done with the firſt thing aſſerted by the Apoſtle here in the text; *That God tempts no man to ſin. Let no man ſay, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted of evil, neither tempteth he any man.* Before I proceed to the ſecond aſſertion, *that every man is his own greateſt tempter,* I ſhould draw ſome uſeful inferences from what has been already delivered: but

but I reſerve both the one and the other to the next opportunity.

SERMON CXVI.

The ſins of men not chargeable upon God; but upon themſelves.

JAMES i. 13, 14.

Let no man ſay, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own luſt, and enticed.

The Second ſermon on this text.

WHEN I made entrance upon theſe words, I told you, that next to the belief of a God and a providence, nothing is more fundamentally neceſſary to the practice of a good life, than the belief of theſe two principles, *That God is not the author of the ſins of men*; and *that every man's fault lies at his own door.* And both theſe principles St. James does clearly and fully aſſert in theſe words;

Firſt, God tempts no man to ſin.

Secondly, Every man is his own greateſt tempter.

The *firſt* of theſe I have largely ſpoken to in my former diſcourſe; and from what I then ſaid, I ſhall only draw a few uſeful inferences, before I proceed to the *ſecond, viz.* theſe which follow:

Firſt, Let us beware of all ſuch doctrines, as do any ways tend to make God the author of ſin; either by laying a neceſſity upon men of ſinning, or by laying ſecret deſigns to tempt and ſeduce men to ſin. Nothing can be farther from the nature of God, than to do any ſuch thing, and nothing can be more diſhonour-

diſhonourable to him, than to imagine any ſuch thing of him; *he is of purer eyes than to behold evil;* and can we think, that he who cannot endure to ſee it, ſhould have any hand in it? We find that the holy men in ſcripture are very careful to remove all thoughts and ſuſpicion of this from God. Elihu, Job xxxvi. 3. before he would argue about God's providence with Job, he reſolves in the firſt place, to attribute nothing to God that *is* unworthy of him. *I will* (ſays he) *aſcribe righteouſneſs to my maker.* So likewiſe St. Paul, Rom. vii. 7. *What ſhall we ſay then? Is the law ſin? God forbid. Is the law ſin?* that is, hath God given men a law to this end, that he might draw them into ſin? far be it from him. Gal. ii. 17. *Is Chriſt the miniſter of ſin? God forbid.*

You ſee then how tender good men have always been of aſcribing any thing to God, that might ſeem to render him the author of ſin. So that we have reaſon to take heed of all doctrines that are of this tendency; ſuch as are the doctrine of an abſolute and irreſpective decree to damn the greateſt part of mankind; and in order to that, and as a means to it, efficaciouſly to permit them to ſin. For if theſe things be true, that God hath abſolutely decreed to damn the greateſt part of men, and to make good this decree, he permits them to ſin, not by a bare permiſſion of leaving them to themſelves, but by ſuch a permiſſion as ſhall be efficacious; that is, he will ſo permit them to ſin as they cannot avoid it; then thoſe who are under this decree of God, are under a neceſſity of ſinning; which neceſſity, ſince it does not proceed from themſelves, but from the decree of God, does by conſequence make God the author of ſin. And then that other doctrine, which is ſubſervient to this, That God does by a phyſical and natural influence upon the minds and wills of men, determine them to every action that they do, to bad actions as well as good. I know they who ſay ſo, tell us that God only determines men to the action, but not to the evil of it. For inſtance, when Cain killed his brother

ther, God determined him (they ſay) to the natural action of taking away a man's life, which in many caſes may be done without ſin. Very true: But if in theſe circumſtances the natural action could not be done without committing the ſin, he that determined him to the natural action, determined him likewiſe to the ſin.

I am far from any thought that thoſe that maintain theſe doctrines, had any intention to make God the author of ſin: But if this be the neceſſary conſequence of theſe doctrines, there is reaſon enough to reject them, how innocent ſoever the intention be of thoſe who maintain them.

Secondly, Let us not tempt any man to ſin. All piety pretends to be an imitation of God, therefore let us endeavour to be like him in this. It is true indeed, we may be tempted with evil, and therefore we are likely enough to tempt others; but we ought not to do ſo. It is contrary to holineſs and goodneſs, to the temper and diſpoſition of the moſt perfect Being in the world, God tempts no man; nay, it is the proper work and employment of the Devil, it is his very trade and profeſſion; he goes about ſeeking whom he may betray into ſin and deſtruction. To this end he walks up and down the earth, waiting all opportunities and advantages upon men, to draw them into ſin; ſo that we are his factors and inſtruments, whenever we tempt men to ſin.

Let thoſe conſider this, who are ſo active and buſy to ſeduce men into any kind of wickedneſs, and to inſtruct them in the arts of iniquity, who tempt men into bad company and courſes, and take pleaſure in debauching a virtuous perſon, and make it matter of great triumph to make a ſober man drunk, as if it were ſo glorious an action to ruin a ſoul, and deſtroy that which is more worth than the whole world. Whenever you go about this work, remember whoſe inſtruments you are, and whoſe work you do, and what kind of work it is. Tempting others to ſin is in ſcripture called murder, for which reaſon the Devil is ſaid to be *a murderer from the beginning*, becauſe he was a tempter. *Whoſoever committeth*

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ſin is of the Devil: but whoſoever tempts others to ſin, is a ſort of Devil himſelf.

Thirdly, Since God tempts no man, let us not tempt him. There is frequent mention in ſcripture of mens tempting God, *i. e.* trying him as it were whether he will do any thing for their ſakes, that is misbecoming his goodneſs and wiſdom, and faithfulneſs, or any other of his perfections. Thus the Iſraelites are ſaid to have tempted God in the wilderneſs forty years together, and in that ſpace, more remarkably ten times. The meaning of which expreſſions is, that when God had promiſed Abraham to bring his ſeed into the land of Canaan, that people by their great and repeated provocations of God, did often provoke him to have deſtroyed them, and conſequently to have failed of the promiſe which he made to the fathers. The Devil likewiſe tempted our Saviour to tempt God, by caſting himſelf down from the pinnacle of the temple, in confidence that the Angels would take care of him: But our Saviour anſwers him, *It is written, Thou ſhalt not tempt the Lord thy God.* From which inſtance it appears, that men are ſaid to tempt God, whenever they expect the protection of his providence in an unwarrantable way. God hath promiſed to take care of good men, but if they neglect themſelves, or willingly caſt themſelves into danger, and expect his providence and protection, they do not truſt God, but tempt him; they try whether God's providence will countenance their raſhneſs, and provide for them, when they neglect themſelves, and protect them from thoſe dangers, to which they wilfully expoſe themſelves.

So likewiſe if we be negligent in our callings, whereby we ſhould provide for our families, if we laviſh away that which we ſhould lay up for them, and then depend upon the providence of God to ſupply them, and take care of them, we tempt God to that which is unworthy of him; which is to give approbation to our folly, and to countenance our ſloth and careleſsneſs. We cannot ſeduce God, and draw him to do any thing that misbecomes him, but we tempt him in expecting the care and protection of

his providence, when we wilfully run ourſelves into danger, and neglect the means of providing for our own ſafety. And thus I have done with the firſt great principle contained in the text; *viz. That God is not the author of the ſins of men.* I proceed now to the

Second, *That every man is his own greateſt tempter. But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own luſt, and enticed.* God does not tempt any man to ſin: But every man is then tempted, when by his own luſt, his irregular inclination and deſire, he is ſeduced to evil, and enticed; καὶ δελεαζόμενος, is caught as it were with a bait, for ſo the Greek word ſignifies.

In which words the Apoſtle gives us a true account of the prevalency and efficacy of temptation upon men. It is not becauſe God has any deſign to enſnare men in ſin; but their own corruption and vicious inclinations ſeduce them to that which is evil. To inſtance in the particular temptations the Apoſtle was ſpeaking of, perſecution and ſuffering for the cauſe of religion, to avoid which, many did then forſake the truth, and apoſtatized from their Chriſtian profeſſion. The true cauſe of which was not the providence of God, which permitted them to be expoſed to thoſe ſufferings; but their inordinate love of the good things of this life, and their unreaſonable fears of the evils and ſufferings of it; they valued the enjoyments of this preſent life more than the favour of God, and that eternal happineſs which he had promiſed to them in another life; and they feared the perſecutions of men more than the threatenings of God, and the dreadful puniſhments of another world. They had an inordinate affection for the eaſe and pleaſure of this life, and their unwillingneſs to part with theſe, was a great temptation to them to quit their religion; by this bait they were caught, when it came to the trial.

And thus it is proportionably in all other ſorts of temptations. Men are betrayed by themſelves, and the temptation without hath a party within them, with

with which it holds a ſecret correſpondence, and which is ready to yield and give conſent to it; ſo that it is our own conſent, and treachery to ourſelves, that makes any temptation maſter of us, and without that we are not to be overcome; *every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own luſt, and enticed.* It is the luſt of men complying with the temptations which are offered to us, which renders them effectual, and gives them the victory over us.

In the handling of this argument, I ſhall, from theſe words of the Apoſtle, obſerve to you theſe two things:

Firſt, That as the Apoſtle doth here acquit God from any hand in tempting men to ſin, ſo he does not aſcribe the prevalency of temptation to the Devil.

Secondly, That he aſcribes the prevalency of temptation to the luſts and vicious inclinations of men, which ſeduce them to a compliance with the temptations that are preſented to them; *every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own luſt, and enticed.* Theſe two obſervations ſhall be the ſubject of my preſent diſcourſe.

Firſt, That as the Apoſtle doth here acquit God from any hand in tempting men to ſin, ſo he does not aſcribe the prevalency and efficacy of temptation to the Devil. That he acquits God, I have ſhewn at large in my former diſcourſe. It is evident likewiſe, that he does not aſcribe the efficacy and prevalency of temptation to the Devil; for the Apoſtle in this diſcourſe of his concerning temptations makes no expreſs mention of the Devil; he ſuppoſeth indeed, that baits are laid for men; *every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own luſt, and enticed, i. e.* when he plays with the baits that are laid for him, and ſwallows them. And the ſcripture elſewhere frequently tells us, that the Devil is very active and buſy to tempt men, and is continually laying baits before them; but their own luſts are the cauſe why they are caught by them.

And I do the rather inſiſt upon this, becauſe men are apt to lay great load upon the Devil, in the buſineſs of temptation, hoping thereby either wholly, or at leaſt in a great meaſure to excuſe themſelves; and therefore I ſhall here conſider how far the Devil by his temptations is the cauſe of the ſins which men by compliance with thoſe temptations are drawn into.

Firſt, It is certain that the Devil is very active and buſy to miniſter to them the occaſions of ſin, and temptations to it. For ever ſince he fell from God, partly out of enmity to him, and partly out of envy and malice to mankind, he hath made it his great buſineſs and employment to ſeduce men to ſin; and to this end he walks up and down the earth, and watcheth all occaſions and opportunities to tempt men to ſin; and, ſo far as his power reacheth, and God permits him, he lays baits and temptations before them in all their ways, preſenting them with the occaſions and opportunities to ſin, and with ſuch baits and allurements as are moſt ſuitable to their tempers, and moſt likely to prevail with their particular inclinations, and as often as he can, ſurpriſing men with theſe at the eaſieſt time of acceſs, and with ſuch circumſtances, as may give his temptations the greateſt force and advantage. Of this the ſcripture aſſures us in general, when it tells us of theſe wiles and devices of Satan, and of the methods of his temptations; ſo that though we do not particularly diſcern how and when he doth this, yet we have no reaſon to doubt of the thing, if we believe that there is ſuch a ſpirit in the world, as the ſcripture particularly tells us there is, that *works in the children of diſobedience*; and that God from whom nothing is hid, and who ſees all the ſecret engines which are at work in the world, to do us good or harm, hath in mercy to mankind given us particular warning of it, and that we may not be wholly ignorant of our enemies, and their malicious deſigns upon us, and that we may be continually upon our guard, aware of our danger, and armed againſt it.

Secondly,

Secondly, The Devil does not only preſent to men the temptations and occaſions to ſin; but when he is permitted to make nearer approaches to them, does excite and ſtir them up to comply with theſe temptations, and to yield to them. And this he does, not only by employing his inſtruments to ſollicit for him, and to draw men to ſin by bad counſel and example, which we ſee frequently done, and probably very often by the Devil's inſtigation; (thoſe who are very wicked themſelves, and conſequently more enſlaved to the Devil, and under his power, being as it were factors for him to ſeduce others;) but beſides this, it is not improbable but the Devil himſelf does many times immediately excite men to ſin, by working upon the humours of their bodies, or upon their imaginations; and by that means infuſing and ſuggeſting evil motions into them; or by diverting them from thoſe thoughts and conſiderations which might check and reſtrain them from that wickedneſs to which he is tempting them; or by ſome other ways and means more ſecret and unknown to us. For the power of ſpirits, whether good or bad, and the manner of their operations upon our minds, are things very ſecret, and of which we can give little or no account; but yet for all that, we have many times reaſon ſufficient to believe a thing to be ſo, when we are wholly ignorant of the manner of it.

And there is reaſon, from what is ſaid in ſcripture, to believe that the Devil, in ſome caſes, hath a more immediate power and influence upon the minds of men, to excite them to ſins, and, where he diſcovers a very bad inclination or reſolution, to help it forward, and to keep men to it; as when it is ſaid, John xiii. 27. that the *Devil entered into Judas*, to puſh him on in that ill deſign which he had already engaged in, of betraying our Saviour. And Acts v. 3. Satan is ſaid to have *filled the heart of Ananias, to lie to the Holy Ghoſt, and to keep back part of the price* for which he had ſold his eſtate; which expreſſions did ſeem to intimate to us ſome more immediate power and influence which the

Devil had upon thoſe perſons: but then it is very obſervable, that this power is never aſcribed to the Devil, but in the caſe of great and horrid ſins, and where men are before-hand notoriouſly depraved, and either by the actual commiſſion of ſome former great ſin, or by entertaining ſome very wicked deſign, have provoked God to permit the Devil a nearer acceſs to them. For Judas had firſt taken counſel how to betray Chriſt, before it is ſaid *the Devil entered into him*, to puſh him on to the execution of it. And Ananias his covetouſneſs had firſt tempted him to keep back part of his eſtate, before it is ſaid *the Devil filled his heart to lie to the Holy Ghoſt*; ſo that what power the Devil hath over men, they firſt give it him; they conſent to his outward temptations, before he can get within them. Hence it is that in ſcripture great ſinners are deſcribed, as being more immediately under the government and influence of the Devil. Epheſ. ii. 1, 2. where the Apoſtle ſpeaking of thoſe, who from Heatheniſm were converted to Chriſtianity, *You* (ſays he) *hath he quickened, who were once dead in treſpaſſes and ſins; wherein in times paſt ye walked, according to the courſe of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the ſpirit that now worketh in the children of diſobedience, or unbelief*; τοῦ πνεύματος τὸ νῦν ἐνεργοῦντος, *the ſpirit that ſtill acts and inſpires the children of unbelief*; that is, thoſe who continue in their infidelity, and would not believe and obey the goſpel. When men are notoriouſly wicked and diſobedient to the counſels of God, the Devil is ſaid to act and inſpire them, which certainly ſignifies ſome more immediate power and influence which he hath over ſuch perſons.

For as it is very probable, that the Devil is ſometimes permitted to come near good men ſo as to tempt them; ſo by notorious wickedneſs and impiety, men do give admiſſion to him, and he is permitted by the juſt judgment of God to exerciſe greater dominion over them. By reſiſting his temptations, we drive him from us. So St. James tells us, chap. iv. 7. *Reſiſt the Devil, and he will flee from you*;

you: but as we yield to his temptations, he continually makes nearer approaches to us, and gains a greater power over us.

Thirdly, But for all this, the Devil can force no man to ſin; his temptations may move and excite men to ſin, but that they are prevalent and effectual, proceeds from our own will and conſent; it is our own luſts cloſing with his temptations, that produce ſin. The Devil hath more or leſs power over men, according as they give way to him; but never ſo much as to force their wills, and to compel them to conſent to, and comply with his temptations: The grace of God doth hardly offer this violence to men for their good, in order to their ſalvation; and therefore much leſs will he permit the Devil to have this power over men to their ruin and deſtruction. God's commanding us to reſiſt the Devil, ſuppoſeth that his temptations are not irreſiſtible.

Fourthly, From what hath been ſaid, it appears, that though the Devil be frequently acceſſary to the ſins of men, yet we ourſelves are the authors of them; he tempts us many times to ſin, but it is we that commit it. His temptations may ſometimes be ſo violent as to extenuate our fault, but never ſo forcible as wholly to excuſe us; for we are ſo far guilty of ſin, as we give our conſent to it; and how powerful ſoever the temptation be to any kind of evil, there is always enough of our own will in it to render us guilty.

I am far from thinking that the Devil tempts men to all the evil that they do. I rather think that the greateſt part of the wickedneſs that is committed in the world, ſprings from the evil motions of mens own minds. Mens own luſts are generally to them the worſt Devil of the two, and do more ſtrongly incline them to ſin, than any Devil without them can tempt them to it. It is not to be doubted, that the Devil does all the miſchief he can to the ſouls of men, ſo far as God permits him; and though the number of evil Angels be probably very great, yet it is but finite, and every one of them hath a limited power; and though they be very active, yet they

they can be but one where at once; ſo that his malice at the utmoſt does only all the evil that it can, not all that it would; he plies where he has the beſt cuſtom, where he has the faireſt opportunity, and the greateſt hopes; he leaves men many times for a ſeaſon, as (it is ſaid) he did our Saviour, becauſe he deſpairs of ſucceſs at that time; and it may be ſometimes when he is gone, theſe perſons grow ſecure, and through their own ſecurity and folly fall into thoſe ſins, which the Devil with all his baits and wiles, whilſt they were upon their guard, could not tempt them to commit.

Others, after he has made them ſure, and put them into the way of it, will go on of themſelves, and are as mad of ſinning, and as forward to deſtroy themſelves, as the Devil himſelf could wiſh; ſo that he can hardly tempt men to any wickedneſs, which he does not find them inclined to of themſelves. Theſe he can truſt with themſelves, and leave them to their own inclinations and conduct, finding by experience, that they will do as ill things of their own motion, as if Satan ſtood continually at their right hand to prompt them, and put them on, ſo that he can go into a far country, and employ himſelf elſewhere, and leave them for a long time, being confident that in his abſence they will not bury their talent, and hide it in a napkin, but will improve it to a great advantage. And I wiſh that our own age did not afford us too many inſtances of this kind, of ſuch forward and expert ſinners, as need no tempter either to inſtruct or excite them to that which is evil. Now in this caſe the Devil betakes himſelf to other perſons, and removes his ſnares and baits where he thinks there is more need and occaſion for them.

So that we may reaſonably conclude, that there is a great deal of wickedneſs committed in the world, which the Devil hath no immediate hand in, though he always rejoiceth in it when it is done; and that there is a great deal more reaſon to attribute all good to the motions and operations of the Spirit of God, than to aſcribe all ſin and wickedneſs in the world

to the Devil; becauſe the Spirit of God is more powerful, and he always every where, and is more intent upon his deſign, and as forward to promote it, as the Devil can be to carry on his work; nay, I doubt not but he is more active to excite men to good, than the Devil can be to tempt them to evil. And yet for all this, I think there is no great reaſon to doubt, but that good men do many good actions of their own inclination, without any ſpecial and immediate motion from the Spirit of God. They are indeed at firſt regenerate, and ſanctified by the Holy Ghoſt, and are continually afterwards under the conduct of the ſame Spirit: But where there is a new nature, it is of itſelf inclinable to that which is good, and will bring forth fruits and do actions anſwerable. Much leſs do I think that the Devil tempts every man to all the evil that he does, or the greateſt part. When the luſts of men, and the habits of vice are grown ſtrong and confirmed, the Devil may ſpare his temptations in a great meaſure; for after wicked men are wound up to ſuch a pitch of impiety, they will go a great while of themſelves.

I have done with the firſt obſervation, that as the Apoſtle acquits God from having any hand in tempting men to ſin, ſo neither does he aſcribe the efficacy and prevalency of temptation to the Devil. I proceed to the

Second obſervation, That he aſcribes the efficacy and ſucceſs of temptation to the luſts and vicious inclinations of men, which ſeduce them to a conſent and compliance with the temptations which are afforded to them. *Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own luſt, and enticed.* We have many powerful enemies; but we are much more in danger of treachery from within, than of aſſaults from without. All the power of our enemies could not deſtroy us if we were but true to ourſelves; ſo that the Apoſtle had great reaſon to aſcribe the efficacy of temptation, to the irregular deſires and vicious inclinations of men, rather than to thoſe temptations which the providence of God permits them

to

to be aſſaulted with, and conſequently to lay the blame of mens ſins chiefly upon themſelves;

And that chiefly upon theſe two accounts:

Firſt, Becauſe the luſts of men are in a great meaſure voluntary.

Secondly, God hath put it in our power to reſiſt thoſe temptations, and overcome them. Now ſo far as the luſts of men are voluntary, it is their own fault that they are ſeduced by them; and if God hath put it in our power to reſiſt and overcome temptations, we may blame ourſelves, if we be overcome and foiled by them.

Firſt, The luſts of men are in a great meaſure voluntary. By the luſts of men, I mean their irregular deſires, and vicious inclinations. I grant that the nature of man is very much corrupted, and degenerated from its primitive integrity and perfection: But we who are Chriſtians, have received that grace in baptiſm, whereby our natures are ſo far healed, as if we be not wanting to ourſelves, and do not neglect the means which God hath appointed to us, we may mortify our luſts, and live a new life; ſo that if our luſts remain unmortified, we ourſelves are in fault, much more if they gain new ſtrength, and proceed to habits; for this could not be, if we did not after we come to age, and are able to diſcern between, and to chooſe good and evil, voluntarily conſent to iniquity, and by wilful and deliberate practice of known ſins, improve the evil inclinations of our nature into vicious habits: But if, inſtead of mortifying and ſubduing the evil propenſions of our nature (which is no very difficult work to moſt perſons, if they begin it betimes) we will cheriſh and give new life and power to them, we forfeit the grace which we received in baptiſm, and bring ourſelves again under the power and dominion of ſin; and no wonder then, if our luſts ſeduce us, and make us ready to comply with the temptations of the world and the Devil.

Nay, and after this it is ſtill our own fault, if we do not mortify our luſts; for if we would hearken to the counſel of God, and obey his calls to repentance, and

and ſincerely beg his grace and holy Spirit to this purpoſe, we might yet recover ourſelves, and *by the Spirit mortify the luſts of the fleſh*; for though we have left God, he hath not quite forſaken us, but is ready to afford his grace again to us, though we have neglected and abuſed it, and to give his holy Spirit to thoſe that ask him, though they have forfeited it: ſo that though our luſts ſpring from ſomething which is natural, yet that they live and have dominion over us, is voluntary, becauſe we might remedy it if we would, and make uſe of thoſe means which God in the goſpel offers to us.

Secondly, God hath put it in our power to reſiſt theſe temptations, and overcome them; ſo that it is our own fault, if we yield to them, and be overcome by them.

It is naturally in our power to reſiſt many ſorts of temptations; and the grace of God, if we do not neglect it, and be not wanting to ourſelves, puts it into our power to reſiſt any temptation that may happen to us.

Firſt, It is naturally in our power to reſiſt many ſorts of temptations. If we do but make uſe of our natural reaſon, and thoſe conſiderations which are common and obvious to men, we may eaſily reſiſt the temptations to a great many ſins. Some ſins are ſo horrid in their nature, that when we have the ſtrongeſt temptations to them, we cannot but have a natural averſion from them; as deliberate murder, the danger and guilt whereof, are both ſo great, as make it eaſy for any conſiderate man to reſiſt the ſtrongeſt temptation to it, even that of revenge. A plain act of injuſtice, whether by great fraud, or by downright oppreſſion, is ſo baſe and diſgraceful, ſo odious and abhorred by human nature, that it is not difficult to a man that hath but a common underſtanding, and common inclination to be honeſt, to overcome the greateſt temptation of gain and advantage; nay he muſt offer conſiderable violence to his nature and reaſon, to bring himſelf to it at firſt. Profaneneſs and contempt of God and religion is ſo monſtrous a fault, and of ſo dreadful an appearance, that

that every man that will but uſe his reaſon, can have no temptation to it, either from gratifying his humour, or pleaſing his company, or ſhewing his wit, that can be of equal force with the arguments which every man's mind and conſcience is apt to ſuggeſt to him againſt it.

Nay, there are many ſins much inferior to theſe, the temptations whereto may by the ordinary reaſons and conſiderations of prudence and intereſt, be baffled and put out of countenance. To inſtance in common ſwearing, to which I think there is no temptation, either from pleaſure or advantage, but only from faſhion and cuſtom. Now this temptation is eaſy to be conquered, by conſidering that every man that profeſſeth to believe the Bible, muſt acknowledge it to be a ſin; and if any man be convinced that it is a ſin, I dare undertake to convince him that he can leave it. He that can chooſe at any time whether he will ſpeak or not (which it is certainly in every man's power to do) can chooſe whether he will ſwear when he ſpeaks. If he ſays he does it by cuſtom and habit, and when he does not think of it; a very little care and reſolution will in a ſhort time cure any man of that cuſtom; ſo that it is naturally in every man's power, to break off this ſin.

Secondly, The grace of God puts it into our power, if we do not neglect it, and be not wanting to ourſelves, to reſiſt any temptation that may happen to us; and what the grace of God puts into our power, is as truly in our power, as what we can do ourſelves. God offers his grace to every man under the goſpel, for he has promiſed *to give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him*; and it is naturally in every man's power to ask it, otherwiſe the promiſe ſignifies nothing: for if no man can ask the Spirit of God, till he firſt have it, then to promiſe it to them that ask it, is to promiſe it to them who have it already, and then 'tis needleſs to ask it. And if God offers his grace to every man, then 'tis every man's fault if he have it not; and every man that hath it, may by the ordinary aſſiſtance of that grace, reſiſt any ordinary temptation. And if at any time God ſuffers good men

to

to be aſſaulted, he hath promiſed in ſuch caſes an extraordinary grace and aſſiſtance: and that either *he will not ſuffer us to be tempted above what we are able,* or *that with the temptation he will find a way to eſcape, that we may be able to bear it.*

And thus I have done with the ſecond thing I propounded to ſpeak to from theſe words, *that every man is his own greateſt tempter. Every man is tempted, when he is drawn aſide of his own luſt and enticed.* And now the proper inferences from what I have been all this while diſcourſing to you are theſe three:

Firſt, Not to think to excuſe our ſelves, by laying the blame of our ſins upon the temptation of the Devil. That the Devil tempts us is not our fault, becauſe we cannot help it; but it is our voluntary compliance with his temptations, our conſenting to that evil which he ſolicits us to, which maketh us guilty. *Every man is tempted when he is drawn aſide of his own luſt:* The luſts of our own hearts give the efficacy to the temptations of the Devil: men many times ſin upon the motions and ſuggeſtions of the Devil: but though he be guilty of tempting us, we are guilty of conſenting to his temptations.

Many times we are not ſure that the Devil tempts us to ſuch a ſin, but we are ſure that we commit it, and conſequently that we are guilty of it. Nay it is certain, if there were no Devil, many would be wicked, and perhaps not much leſs wicked than they are. The luſts and vicious inclinations of men would yield to the temptations of the world, though there were none to manage them, and to ſet them on to the greateſt advantage; ſo that we cannot excuſe our faults upon this account, that we are tempted by the Devil. If this were a ſufficient excuſe for us, the Devil would take no pleaſure in tempting us; the whole deſign of his temptation being to make us guilty; and by the guilt of ſin to make us miſerable.

Secondly, From hence we learn, what reaſon we have to pray to God, that he would *not lead us into temptation, i. e.* not permit us to fall into it; for in the phraſe of ſcripture, God is many times ſaid to

do thoſe things which his providence permits to be done. The beſt of us have ſome remainders of luſt, ſome irregular deſires and appetites, which will be apt to betray us to ſin, when powerful temptations are preſented to us; ſo that it is a great happineſs to the beſt of men, to be kept by the providence of God out of the way of violent temptations, for our own ſtrength to reſiſt them is but ſmall, and we are apt to be ſecure, and to neglect our guard; we are eaſy to be ſurprized, and in continual danger through our own weakneſs or careleſſneſs. Our greateſt ſecurity is, if we be ſincere, and heartily deſirous to do well, and firmly reſolved againſt ſin, and do depend upon God for his grace and aſſiſtance, that his providence will not ſuffer us to fall into the hands of dangerous and violent temptations, which probably would be too hard for us; he who knows what our ſtrength is, *will not ſuffer us to be tempted above what we are able.*

Thirdly, From hence we may learn the beſt way to diſarm temptations, and to take away the power of them, and that is by mortifying our luſts, and ſubduing our vicious inclinations. When this is done, (which by the grace of God may be done) temptation hath loſt its greateſt advantage upon us. It is the conſpiracy of our luſts, with the temptations that ſet upon us, that betrays us into their power. The true reaſon why men fall into ſin, is not becauſe they are tempted, but becauſe there is ſomething within them which inclines and diſpoſes them to comply with the temptation, and to yield to it. It is ſaid, when the Devil came to our Saviour to tempt him, that *he found nothing in him*, and therefore his temptations had no force upon him. The more we mortify our luſts, the leſs the Devil will find in us for his temptations to work upon. Every ſpark is dangerous, when it falls upon combuſtible matter; but though ſparks fly never ſo thick, there is no danger, ſo long as there is nothing about us to catch fire.

If we will not be drawn aſide and enticed to ſin, let

let us mortify our luſts; for ſo far as we are mortified, we are out of the power of temptation.

Men are apt to complain of temptations, that they are too hard for them, and that they are not able to reſiſt them, though they pray to God continually for his grace to that purpoſe. This indeed is one means very proper and neceſſary to be uſed; but this is not all that we are to do; we muſt break off habits of ſin, and ſubdue our luſts, and keep under our inclinations, and then we ſhall find ourſelves able to reſiſt and encounter temptations with more ſucceſs. And till we do this, in vain do we pray for God's grace, and depend upon him for ſtrength to overcome the temptations that do aſſault us: for God's grace was never deſigned to countenance the ſloth and negligence of men, but to encourage and ſecond our reſolutions and endeavours of well-doing. If we expect God's grace and aſſiſtance upon other terms, we tempt God, and provoke him to leave us to the power of temptations, to be *drawn away and enticed by our own luſts.*

The end of the fifth Volume.